UNCLE JIM'S BIBLE STORIES

THE FINDING OF MOSES.

UNCLE JIM'S BIBLE STORIES

BY

HARTWELL JAMES

ILLUSTRATED

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR
IN UNIFORM STYLE

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Uncle Jim's Stories from the Old Testament
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CONTENTS

PAGE

Uncle Jim Comes on a Visit..... 7

Once in Seven Years..... 14

Five Kings in a Cave..... 35

What is Sweeter Than Honey?..... 56

A Farmer's Wife..... 77

The Wisest Man..... 96

The Man Who Did Not Die..... 115

When Iron Did Swim..... 136

With Hammer and Nail..... 157

The First Christmas..... 178

The First Easter..... 198

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UNCLE JIM COMES ON A VISIT.

BETTY BURROUGHS was a pretty little girl with yellow curls and round blue eyes the color of cornflowers in sunlight. She was eight years old, and she laughed most of the time, for she was healthy and happy. She had never learned to giggle, and her mother was anxious that she never should learn. Her mother was anxious about something else, too: Betty did not like to go to Sunday School.

The trouble was that, once she was in her Sunday School Class, she could not sit still. It was useless for her mother to say that the Bible contained the most interesting stories in

the world, and it was more than useless for the Sunday School superintendent to stand up on the platform and read long paragraphs of them. Betty complained that they were too grown-up and didn't sound like real stories. The only stories she understood were her old Mother Goose baby-stories, or fairy-tales about princesses who lost enchanted slippers, and dwarf men named Tom Thumb, and a boy called Aladdin who got everything he wanted just by rubbing an old lamp.

The worst of it was that it came to be Betty's habit, if she was praised for doing something extra well, or if she was told to go to bed early, to reply with coaxing smiles and her arms around her mother's neck, in these invariable words:

"Then, may I stay home from Sunday School next Sunday?"

When a letter arrived one morning at breakfast saying that Uncle Jim Burroughs was coming for a visit of several weeks and would bring Dick, his son and Betty's cousin, the little

girl danced up and down with glee until she very nearly shook off her curls.

"Mother," she pleaded with sudden inspiration, "I'll be good and never once quarrel with Dick the way I did last summer, and never take his marbles, and never say it isn't fair if he wins at backgammon, only please, *please* say you'll let me stay home from Sunday School just as long as Uncle Jim is here."

Mrs. Burroughs looked troubled. She had brown eyes that were sad and often held tears because her husband and Betty's father was the captain of a big ocean steamer. He had to sail with his ship and bear all the responsibilities of carrying cargoes and passengers to a place called Liverpool, and there was sometimes danger from hurricanes and icebergs. Then, too, Betty and her mother were very, very lonely without him. They wished that they could see him every day, and every night Betty prayed that God would bring him home safely to them.

Yet Betty could never associate Sunday

School with the solemn words that she softly said each night in her white nightdress, with her head buried in her mother's lap: Sunday School just meant being washed and dressed, walking carefully and stiffly so as not to wrinkle one's best frock; then sitting still in a row of other starched children for ever and ever so long while a tall, thin lady with a cross face told one to keep quiet and asked questions one could not answer, or scolded because one's nickel for the collection had fallen into a crack in the floor. So Betty thought dear old Uncle Jim, who always romped with her and Dick, might be an excuse for staying at home, while Betty's mother decided to consult this same Uncle Jim quietly about the same matter.

One morning there was great excitement in the Burroughs household when a taxi-cab stopped outside, and Uncle Jim and Cousin Dick stepped out of it with two bulging suit-cases. Betty could not wait. She was out of the door before her mother had time to stop her, and was hugging Uncle Jim, who swung

her high in his strong arms. She even kissed Dick, who looked somehow older and cleaner than when she last saw him. Betty decided that Dick was ever so much more grown up than she had expected to find him. He didn't look so oppressively old and clean, however, after he and Betty, with Uncle Jim's assistance, had finished a pillow fight with all the cushions in the house. Even Mrs. Burroughs, who seldom smiled, laughed outright at their fun.

The days passed like so many hours, and Betty had forgotten all about Sunday and Sunday School when suddenly Sunday arrived. She wondered if Dick disliked Sunday School as much as she did. At last she asked him about it and he confessed to her that it was very unpleasant trying to sit still and listen to things he didn't understand.

Meanwhile Mrs. Burroughs and Uncle Jim had had a long quiet talk, and the latter confessed that he was worried about Dick, too. Dick's mother was dead and his father had

been so absorbed in business he had not paid much attention to Dick, and only recently had he stopped thinking about business long enough to see that he must begin to study his son and find out what was best for him. So when Sunday morning came he told Mrs. Burroughs that he had thought of a plan for the children, and that she must leave everything to him.

Uncle Jim and Mrs. Burroughs, as was their custom, put on their Sunday clothes and went to church that morning, but they did not say a word to Dick and Betty about going. When they returned there was the regular Sunday dinner, with roast beef and mashed potatoes and ice cream for dessert. Still no mention was made of Sunday School. At last the big clock in the living-room struck two, but nothing happened. Then Betty could hold back no longer the question that rose to her lips.

"But, mother," she cried in a queer little voice, "what about Sunday School?"

Uncle Jim leaned far back in his chair and looked hard at Betty.

"I thought," he said, his keen blue eyes twinkling, "that a certain young lady begged to be excused from going to Sunday School while her Uncle Jim was here."

Dick turned and looked amazedly at his cousin, who had not mentioned this to him. Mrs. Burroughs rose and walked toward the farthest window. Betty felt the red of shame mount to the top of her curls.

"I—I—" she began.

"Never mind apologizing," said Uncle Jim. "What do you say? Will you stay at home from Sunday School to hear my story?"

"Yes! Yes!" both children cried.

"And we'll be perfectly good and quiet all the time!" added Betty.

"You'd just better!" said Uncle Jim, pinching her ear. Then he opened a beautiful, red-covered book, full of colored pictures. It looked so interesting that Betty and Dick sat up very straight and eager in their chairs. And then Uncle Jim read them, "Once in Seven Years, the Story of the Jubilee."

ONCE IN SEVEN YEARS

THE STORY OF THE JUBILEE

THE frequent occurrence of the number seven in the Bible is very marked. It is associated with so many important events and objects that biblical scholars have in many instances regarded it as the representative symbolical number of Hebrew literature, and have made great use of it in interpreting the prophetical portions of the Bible.

Certain uses of the number seven in the Scrip-

tures are familiar to us. In the description of the Flood, seven days were given Noah, his family, the clean beasts, and the fowls of the air, in which to enter the ark. The patriarch Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and again another seven years before she became his wife. There were seven years of plenty and seven years of famine while Joseph was governor of Egypt; and the fiery furnace into which the three young princes were thrown, by the orders of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was at this time heated seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated.

From Adam to Jesus, seven resurrections are recorded in the Bible. They are those of the dead man by Elijah, the widow's son by Elisha, the prophet Samuel by the witch of Endor, the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus, the friend of Jesus.

Jesus was on the cross seven hours and spoke seven times while there.

The Israelitish reverence for the number

seven was doubtless derived from their belief that God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh "*from all His work which He had made.*" Their Sabbaths, therefore, were observed with great strictness.

The Israelites were under the peculiar care and guidance of God, who had set them apart as an example of His dealings with man. The land of Canaan, or Palestine, which Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants had occupied before Jacob settled in Egypt, was given them as an inheritance.

On their way to this land the Israelites encamped at one time in the land, or district, of Midian. While there Jethro, the chieftain of that country, attracted by their doings and the fame of his son-in-law Moses, visited him. After slaying an Egyptian in defense of an Israelite whom he was abusing, Moses had fled to the land of Midian. He was able to render a service to the daughters of Jethro by watering their sheep on one occasion, and afterwards married Zipporah, one of them. He also had

served Jethro as a shepherd up to the time he was called to deliver his people from the bondage of the Egyptians.

Jethro brought with him Zipporah and her two children, whom probably Moses had not seen since he parted with them on the way to Egypt. Moses went out to meet them, and it must have been a pleasant and joyful meeting. They went into the tent of Moses, and listened to the wonderful things God had done for His people. Jethro acknowledged God's greatness, saying, *"Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods."* Then he offered sacrifices.

The next day Jethro saw how many people came to Moses to settle their disputes and receive judgment from him. Many had to wait all day, from morning until evening, for Moses could not get through all the cases. He could see how Moses wearied himself, and yet could not do this one work well, while he had so many other things to do.

So he advised Moses to select *"out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth,*

hating unjust gain," and place them as rulers and judges over the people, and to keep in his own hand all cases of appeal, and those of special difficulty or importance.

Moses did as he was advised, appointing *"rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens,"* and out of this wise and simple plan sprang the seeds which afterwards grew into the great Hebrew commonwealth.

After this it would seem that Jethro returned to his own home, although it is evident he kept in touch with Moses, for he desired Jethro to go with them *"as eyes"* in the wilderness. It is possible that his son Hobab remained behind to act as guide. The alliance thus formed between the Kenites and Israelites was never broken; henceforth there was the closest friendship among their descendants.

Sivan, the third month of the Hebrew year, is about the time of our June, and on the third day of the month the Israelites were encamped before Mount Sinai. A plain enclosed by high

peaks and cliffs is said to be the place where they pitched their tents. It was from this plain that Moses went up the mountain at God's command.

Three days were spent in solemn preparation, and bounds were set around the mountain, which was not to be touched by man or beast under the penalty of death. On the third day fire descended upon the mountain, and it was enveloped in clouds of mist and smoke, while the earth around shook.

Amid the stormy clouds, from which lightning gleamed and thunder muttered, a voice proclaimed the Ten Commandments. The Israelites were so terrified that they retreated as far as possible and then tremblingly besought Moses to pray that the Voice might cease, and that he might be permitted to convey God's commands to them. This petition was granted, and Moses was twice admitted to mysterious communion with God. The second time he beheld as in a vision the appearance of the Tabernacle as it was to be built, and received full di-

rections as to its construction. He also received two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were engraved by the hand of God.

For forty days and forty nights Moses was absent, and in that time the fickle Israelites ceased to believe in a God whom they could not see. Remembering the images before which the Egyptians had bowed down, they persuaded Aaron to make them an idol which should represent Divinity in a form to which they had been accustomed. They gave him their ornaments of gold, and these offerings Aaron moulded into the shape of the sacred calf which was worshipped in Egypt, and then the people sacrificed before the image instead of worshipping God.

Moses appeared when the festival was at its height, and in grief and horror at the sight he cast the sacred tablets from him, and in their fall they broke. After a few words of reproach to Aaron, Moses destroyed as much of the calf as would burn, by fire, and having beaten the

gold to powder, scattered it upon water which he compelled the people to drink. Then as a more severe punishment, three thousand of those who had worshipped the calf were slain by the swords of those who had remained faithful to God.

The next day Moses presented himself again before God, carrying with him two freshly hewn tablets of stone, and upon them was inscribed another Ten Commandments.

Then followed the building of the Tabernacle. Moses gathered the people together and bade all who were willing to make whatever offerings they could towards its erection. All the people responded to his appeal; some brought gold, silver and jewels, precious metals or stones, ornaments or treasures. Others provided wood and labor; some brought skins of sheep and goats; others did the dyeing. Those who could not give material did the labor. Two men, Bezaleel and Aholiab, were skilful workmen, and wrought with and taught the others what to do.

The Tabernacle was a beautiful and costly

movable tent, made so that it could be easily erected and taken down.

The Tabernacle was forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet high. It was divided into two parts, one was called the holy place, the sides of which were made of acacia wood, covered with beautiful curtains of blue and scarlet it was thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. In this room were the altar of Incense, a golden table, and a golden candlestick with seven branches, made of pure gold. A little inner room was called the Holy of Holies, and was fifteen feet each way. It was covered in so that no earthly light could penetrate it.

It took more than a year to finish the parts to the Tabernacle, and when the work was done, Moses set it up, placed in it the Ark of the Covenant, and anointed Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. Then in the first day of the first month of the second year of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, Moses arranged all the furniture and vessels himself, and offered both a burnt offering and a meat offering.

After the establishment of a priesthood, for which the tribe of Levi was set apart, the decision of difficult cases was submitted through the agency of certain things called Urim and Thummin, meaning light and perfection, the exact nature of which has never been defined, but which appear to have been two objects worn by the high-priest on the inside of his breastplate.

A more direct way of ascertaining the will of God, was by means of prophets, of whom a constant succession was promised.

The Hebrew word for prophet is "Nabi." There is a Hebrew word which means "to bind one's self by seven things." A person, then, wishing to take an oath, might call upon seven things as witnesses of his declaration, or as enduring monuments of the truth. It might be seven men whom he invoked; he might touch seven sacred objects, or take seven steps to a sacred stone. Seven sacrificial animals were presented on these occasions.

Many instances of individuals, as well as na-

tional punishments for violation of God's laws are recorded in the Bible. Nadab, the eldest son of Aaron, the first high-priest, with his father, his brother Abihu, and seventy of the older Israelites had been allowed to accompany Moses for a certain distance when he was commanded to come near to God on Mount Sinai.

Later, in spite of the fact that they belonged to the priesthood, and were versed in the laws regarding sacrifices and offerings, Nadab and Abihu, on one occasion, kindled the incense in their censers with "strange fire" instead of that which burned perpetually upon the altar, and were struck dead by fire from God.

Korah, a Levite, was the leader of a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, who were his cousins. With him were associated Dathan, a Reubenite chieftain, and Abiram and On, also members of the tribe of Reuben. Korah and his followers paid the penalty for their revolt by perishing by an earthquake and by flames of fire.

The ceremonial observances of the Israelites were numerous, and very strictly defined. Sac-

rifices and offerings formed an important part of their religion. There were the burnt-offering, the meal-offering—meal, bread and other vegetable products—the drink-offering, the peace-offering, the sin-offering and the trespass-offering. Fasts and feasts were also included in the ceremonial laws.

On the Day of Atonement—the day of national humiliation—certain animals were slain and offered by the high-priest. Besides this, he laid his hands upon a goat, and, confessing over it all the sins of the people sent it away into uninhabited places. For the cleansing of lepers, certain ceremonies were observed, and then the priest liberated a living bird, and allowed it to fly away wherever it would.

The Israelites kept three great annual festivals, each lasting seven days. These were the Passover, to commemorate the "passing over" of the people by the destroying angel when the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain; the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a thanksgiving

for the harvest, and also referred to the times when the nation dwelt in tents while wandering in the wilderness. It was celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after the fruits of the land had been gathered, and lasted for seven days. During this festival the Israelites dwelt in booths, or tents, made from the branches and boughs of trees. On the morning of the eighth day they dismantled their tents and returned to their homes.

A large variety of trees are mentioned in the Bible, and of these none was of more practical value than the olive tree. It was almost indispensable to the comfort of the Israelites, as many kinds of food were cooked in its oil. Every village had its olive grove, and the cultivation of the trees was closely connected with the domestic life of the Israelites. The oil was used in coronations, and was also mixed with the sacrificial offerings. It was in common use for burning in lamps, and to some extent was employed medicinally.

Among other convocations ordained for the

Israelites was *"A day of blowing trumpets."* This was held on the first day of the seventh month. This blowing of trumpets was entirely different from the trumpet-calls of the priests at the time of the daily sacrifices, and no work was to be done on that day. It is not unlikely that the eighty-first Psalm was composed for the Feast of Trumpets, and at this time it is used in the service of the day in Jewish churches.

At first, the trumpets used by the Israelites were made from the horns of rams, or other animals, but later we read that the trumpets Moses was told to furnish were to be of silver. Trumpets were used for calling the people together, as a signal for journeying, and for sounding alarms of war, as well as for announcing the hour of sacrifices.

The ceremonies of the Israelites required two altars—the Altar of Burnt-Offering and the Altar of Incense. The former varied in construction from time to time. In the Tabernacle it was square, comparatively small and portable.

Upon the Altar of Incense a mixture was used compounded of four ingredients, of which frankincense was one. This mixture was pounded into small particles, and deposited as a very holy thing in the Tabernacle before the Ark of the Covenant, so that a store of it might always be in readiness. It was offered at the time when the people were in the position and act of devotion. Their prayers were supposed to be presented to God by the priest, and to ascend to Him in the smoke and odor of the fragrant offering

The Ark of the Covenant itself was an oblong chest of wood covered with gold, and occupied the most holy spot in the Tabernacle. It contained the tablets of stone engraved by the hand of God, and not unlikely Aaron's rod which budded and brought forth almonds, and which was *"to be kept as a token."* It was the most cherished possession of the Israelites.

Every seventh year, as well as every fiftieth year, was regarded by the ancient Israelites as a Sabbath for the land, during which time the

soil was not to be cultivated. There was to be no sowing or reaping, no pruning or gathering. A special blessing on the land was promised for every sixth year, so that it should bring forth fruits and crops sufficient to last the people for three years.

Seven days was the duration of the national festivals of the Israelites, and of other convocations. A Hebrew servant served six years, and in the seventh was set free. The seventh year was also a release from servitude as well as from bondage.

Slavery was common among the Israelites. Captives taken in battle were regarded as slaves, and, under pressure of poverty, a man might sell himself for a slave, and parents could sell their children. An insolvent debtor, or a thief unable to make restitution, might be sold as a punishment. Slaves were allowed to own property, and to have a wife and children. If they were Israelites they were entitled to their freedom in the seventh, or Sabbatical year, and also on the fiftieth, or Year of Jubilee.

"In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession."

A peculiar custom connected with slavery was that, if a servant was content to live with his wife and children, in his master's service, and would not accept his freedom in the seventh year, then his master would take him before the judges, and, placing his ear against a door post, would thrust an awl through it. This signified that he was to remain in his master's service as long as he lived.

Another mention of door posts occurs in the accounts of Moses' speech to the Israelites at the end of their fortieth year of wandering. In it he recounted God's promises, blessings and punishments, commanding the people to remember and think upon His words at all times, and to teach them to their children. He also said to them, *"And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thy house, and upon thy gates."*

Throughout the history of the Israelites as a nation they were continually warned by their leaders, judges and prophets that, if they trans-

gressed the laws given them by God, swift and sure punishment would certainly follow. In spite of this they continually offended, especially by forsaking the worship of God, and turning to that of idols; and these alternate relapses and periods of repentance and right doing continued until they were subjugated by the tribes they were commanded to drive out of the land which God had given to them.

There had not been a sound from any one but Uncle Jim during the whole story. Now three pairs of eyes instead of two rested on Uncle Jim as he finished reading, for Mrs. Burroughs, too, had listened as attentively as the rest.

"If they gave all their ornaments of gold to make the calf, how did they have any left to give when they built the real Tabernacle?" asked Dick.

Uncle Jim smiled knowingly.

"What do *you* think, Betty?" he asked.

"Not nearly all the people were so foolish as to worship a silly old calf," said Betty. "*I* wouldn't have given my ring just for an idol."

"My watch," said Dick, displaying his gold one that his father had given him on his eleventh birthday, "would have helped in the real Tabernacle. Not much maybe; but wouldn't you have been ashamed if you'd given your jewelry to help make an idol instead of God's house?"

"Mother," asked Betty, "would blue and scarlet curtains be beautiful?" She was looking at the fresh white muslin ones at their own windows.

"Not in our windows, Betty dear," smiled her mother. "but don't you think they would have been very beautiful in the gorgeous Tabernacle with the Altar of Incense and the Ark of the Covenant?"

"I think," said Dick, "that when I grow up I might as well be an architect. I'd like to plan how to build houses and churches, too." Then he added to Betty: "All this makes me see why

Sunday is different from other days. I'd like to go to Sunday School if the teacher read splendid stories like father's."

After the children had gone to their rooms to bed that night, Dick thought about Moses and what a wonderful man he was, while Betty thought of the voice that sounded out of stormy clouds and proclaimed the Ten Commandments while the lightning gleamed and the thunder muttered. She wondered if she would have been very much frightened.

When the children slid down the banisters to breakfast next morning, they were not thinking of the story already told. After a whispered consultation, they made a surprise attack upon Uncle Jim, who sat reading the morning newspaper, and began teasing him to find another story for them.

He looked very much amazed.

"Why," he asked, putting one arm about his curly-headed niece and the other about his determined-looking son, "how can I? It isn't Sunday."

Betty, who felt guilty, buried her face in Uncle Jim's shoulder; then she mustered her courage and said:

"But perhaps you have an extra good story for Monday. Please try to think of one, Uncle Jim."

"Yes, please do," urged Dick.

"Well," said Uncle Jim, "I will break the rule to-day if you will promise to eat your breakfast and not even speak of stories until eleven o'clock."

At eleven to the dot, Betty and Dick besieged him again. "It's eleven," they reminded him in chorus.

"I am going to read to you to-day," said Uncle Jim, "the story of a great battle, and we'll call the story, 'Five Kings In a Cave.' "

FIVE KINGS IN A CAVE.

THE STORY OF A GREAT BATTLE.

IN the last chapter of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Old Testament, we are told that *". . . Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him."*

With the exception of Jesus, the mission of Moses was the greatest ever entrusted to a man.

From early manhood, at least, Moses appears to have been wrapped up in a love for his people. He found them in bondage to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, oppressed by cruel taskmasters, and compelled to perform the duties of common laborers. He took them from this condition and made of them a nation.

But for all this love for his people, and for all his hatred of oppression, Moses shrank at first from the task of delivering the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt. For forty years he had been an Arabian shepherd, living in the seclusion and simplicity of a shepherd's life.

The divine call came to him in the wilderness near the mountain of Horeb, where he beheld a bush of acacia apparently on fire. Yet, as he looked, the bush was not consumed, and soon the voice of God was heard from its midst, telling him that He had heard the cry of the children of Israel; that He proposed to set them free; and that He had chosen Moses himself to be the deliverer of his countrymen, and their

conductor to the land which He had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Moses felt unequal to such an immense undertaking. He urged that the Israelites would not listen to him; that he would be unable to convince them of his mission; and that he was not fitted to plead either with king or people.

But God bestowed upon him power to do wonderful things by which he would be able to convince all doubters; promised that the words he was to speak should he put into his mouth; and that his brother Aaron should go with him and act as his spokesman.

Moses began his work. He first got the people to believe in him, and then he appealed to Pharaoh to let the Israelites go to their promised inheritance. His successive appeals to the king were met with positive refusals, and for these refusals God sent nine national calamities, each more severe than the other, upon the Egyptian nation. Still Pharaoh refused, and increased his oppression of the Israelites.

Once more God laid his hand upon the Egyp-

tians. The first-born in every Egyptian home, and the first-born of all their cattle, died; then Pharaoh agreed to Moses' demand, and allowed the children of Israel to leave his kingdom, with their substance, which was considerable, in flocks and herds at least, increased by valuable gifts.

Once they were gone, however, Pharaoh repented of what he had done; pursued the people he had just emancipated with a great army; followed them into the channel formed by the receding waters of the Red Sea, and with all his host perished miserably there in the returning waters.

For the ensuing forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, continually grumbling and finding fault with their leader. The burden he was compelled to bear by this thankless and obstinate people was a heavy one, but without reserve he gave himself up to their welfare. His life came to a close at the end of the forty years of wandering, and then, and then

only, did the Israelites mourn him as the greatest man of their race.

Joshua was the man who led this people across the River Jordan, conquered for them the promised land, and distributed it among the tribes. His first appearance in the Bible narrative is at the time when the Israelites, unused to war, won the battle with the Amalekites at Rephidim. He was their general when the nation for the first time took up arms to defend themselves.

During this long and fierce fight, Moses, at the top of a hill, looked on in prayer and trust. With him were his brother Aaron, and Hur, the husband of his sister Miriam. As the day wore on, Moses' hands grew heavy from being held so long in an attitude of prayer, and whenever he let them fall from weariness, the Amalekites prevailed. So Aaron and Hur seated him upon a stone and held up his aching arms until Joshua had won the victory.

Joshua belonged to the tribe of Ephraim—the second son of Joseph—and the name of his

father was Nun. Hoshea is another form of the word Joshua, and means "salvation." It is also given as Oshea, which means "help," Jehoshua, Jeshua, and Jesus. By this last name Joshua is mentioned twice in the New Testament. Shortly before his death, Moses solemnly invested Joshua with the command which he was so soon to lay down; and after the death of Moses, God promised to aid Joshua, saying:

"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

A born soldier, strong and brave, as the leader of a nation should be, Joshua now began the second period of his career. At this time the Israelites were a very different nation from the timorous people that Moses had led out of Egypt. Forty years of nomadic life had made them not unlike the tribes from whom they were to wrest the land of Canaan, according to God's promise. They were hardy, enthusiastic, and ready to follow their new leader.

Before entering the promised land, Joshua sent spies across the River Jordan into Jericho, and learned from them that the inhabitants of that city were already afraid of the Israelites. They were able to tell him that a woman who had been kind to them, in fact, hiding them when their lives were in danger, said to them:

"I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you."

Having this information, Joshua made ready to cross the river. He ordered the encampment broken up, and arranged the order of march. Priests, carrying the ark of the covenant, went first, and, with a space of about a mile between them, the main body of the people followed on. Joshua had told them that God was about to work wonders on their behalf, and, eagerly expectant, they marched steadily towards the stream that rolled between them and their inheritance.

As soon as the feet of the priests touched its

waters, the river ceased to flow onward, and as the host reached its brink they beheld, as their fathers had done on the shores of the Red Sea, a crossing prepared by God for his chosen people.

With the ark supported on their shoulders, the priests stood motionless as the people streamed past them and gained the opposite bank. Then one chief from each of the twelve tribes took upon his shoulder a stone from the place where the priests still stood, and crossed to the other side.

When this had been done, Joshua set up twelve other stones in the middle of the miraculously made passageway, and the Bible says, "*they are there unto this day.*" Then, at Joshua's command, the priests and their sacred burden moved forward, and as soon as they were safely on the western bank, the river flowed onward as before.

Gilgal was the place where the Israelites made their first camp after crossing the Jordan, and there the twelve stones which were borne

across by the chiefs were set up as a memorial. Then Joshua addressed the people in these words:

"When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever."

The Israelites were now in the promised land, and one of their first acts was to keep the Passover, a national feast instituted on the night when Moses led their fathers out of Egypt.

On the following day the supply of manna ceased. This manna was a food supplied by God as a substitute for bread, from day to day, during the forty years of wandering. It was

no longer needed, and its cessation showed the Israelites that the weary wilderness was a thing of the past. Now they could eat of the grain and fruits of the land of Canaan.

The word Canaan, as applied to the land itself, means "lowland," in distinction from the higher lands on the east side of the Jordan. As applied to a person, it refers to Canaan, the fourth son of Ham, who was the second son of Noah, and from him sprang the various nations whom the Israelites found peopling a large part of the country west of the Jordan.

Rich and powerful kings ruled the land of Canaan. They had walled cities, fortresses, and armies, and were leagued together by treaties and agreements. Yet we are told that, when they learned that God had made the waters of Jordan stand still to allow a nation of strangers to enter their country, they were almost in a state of panic.

Jericho, a very ancient city, lay directly in the path of the invading Israelites. It was ruled by a king, and its walls were so thick

that houses were built upon them. At this time it was in a state of strict defence, for it would naturally be the first object of attack by the Israelites.

We can easily conceive that Joshua, who was as prudent as he was brave, personally examined the country about Jericho before investing the city. On one occasion he suddenly saw before him a man with a drawn sword in his hand. Boldly he challenged him: *"Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"* and the answer came, *"Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come."*

Then Joshua was told to take the shoes from off his feet, for the place was holy ground—the same command given to Moses from the midst of the burning bush. It was the voice of God, and Joshua *"fell on his face to the earth, and did worship."* After this, God gave Joshua directions how to take the city of Jericho, and Joshua followed these instructions exactly. In all, God spoke to Joshua on eight different occasions.

Each day, for six days, the army of the Israelites marched once around the city, the appointed priests carrying the ark, with seven other priests preceding it, blowing upon trumpets made of rams' horns. About dawn on the seventh day they made the circuit of the city seven times, after which the priests blew upon the trumpets, and the army raised a mighty shout. Then the walls of Jericho crashed to the ground.

Over the ruins the Israelitish army poured into the city and destroyed every man, woman, and child in it, except the woman who had befriended the two spies and those who were in her house. All cattle, sheep, and beasts of burden were also destroyed. The taking of Jericho in this manner is one of the fifty-five miracles recorded in the Old Testament.

The spoil of Jericho was immense, and the Israelites were strictly commanded not to retain any article for individual use; everything was to be consecrated to God: but there was a man named Achan, of the tribe of Judah, who

coveted certain things that he had found, and hid them in his tent.

After Jericho was taken, Joshua sent out spies to report upon a city called Ai. They brought back word that Ai could be easily taken by two or three thousand men. Joshua despatched an army of about three thousand men against the city, but the men of Ai easily repulsed them and drove them down the hill, killing many of them.

This discouraged the Israelites, and Joshua fell upon his face, imploring God not to deliver them to their enemies. God commanded him to rise up from the ground, and told him that the Israelites had sinned in keeping back some of the spoil of Jericho, which He had demanded consecrated to His service, and for this reason they had been defeated.

Then Joshua called the people together, and by the casting of lots God showed him who had sinned. The lot fell upon Achan, and he then confessed that he had kept for himself a beautiful garment and some pieces of silver and

gold. His tent was searched and the booty was found there.

As a punishment, Achan and his family were stoned to death, and then, with everything that he had possessed, they were burned to ashes in a valley which was afterwards named Achor, which means "trouble." The Bible records eight other instances of casting lots, and six other instances of persons having been stoned to death.

Joshua captured Ai eventually, burned the city, and hanged its king upon a tree. News of what had been done at Jericho and Ai must have spread abroad, for soon the Canaanitish kings banded together to crush the Israelites. The people of Gibeon, however, knowing that God was with the invaders, determined to make peace with them if possible, and sent ambassadors to the camp at Gilgal. Their shoes were worn out, as if with a long journey, their clothes were old, and the bread which they showed to Joshua was dry and mouldy.

Joshua and the princes, or chiefs, of the

tribes, were deceived by these things. They thought that the Gibeonites had really come a long journey, and, without laying the matter before God, as they should have done, made a treaty of peace with them.

When it was discovered that their journey had been a very short one, and that they were from one of the tribes which God had commanded should be destroyed, they confessed their stratagem, saying they had resorted to it to save their lives.

Because of his promise not to kill them, Joshua could not do so, but he ordered that they should be *"hewers of wood and drawers of water"* for the Israelites and for the altar of the Lord.

It was not long before five Amorite kings, alarmed at the progress of the Israelitish invasion, made a league with each other for the purpose of destroying Gibeon. These confederates were Adoni-zedec, king of Jerusalem, Hoham, king of Hebron, Piram, king of Jarmuth, Japhia, king of Lachish, and Debir, king of Eg-

lon. The king of Jerusalem was the leading spirit in the confederation.

Gibeon was a royal city, much larger than Ai, and was one of four cities belonging to the Hivites, a nation mentioned in the narrative of Jacob's return to the land of Canaan. It was about five miles from Jerusalem, and is known now as El-Jib. Believing that the Israelites would be strengthened by their alliance with the Gibeonites the five kings massed their armies, and encamped before Gibeon.

Once more God spoke to Joshua, saying to him, "*Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.*" So Joshua made a night-march, fell upon the confederates suddenly, and inflicted a terrible slaughter on them. The armies of the five kings fled before the Israelites, and, as they hurried on, God rained great hailstones upon them, and the hailstones killed more than were slain by the sword.

As the Israelites were pursuing their enemies, the daylight began to fail, and Joshua

prayed to God to lengthen the day. And God did so by causing the sun to stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, so that there was sufficient light to destroy the armies of the five kings. Of this day the Bible says:

"*And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.*" But the five kings escaped and hid themselves in a cave.

After the army had returned to Gilgal, word was brought to Joshua that the five kings were in a cave at Makkedah. At once he ordered the mouth of the cave to be stopped with great stones, and a guard set by it. Then he ordered an unrelenting pursuit of any of the enemy who might have escaped, and only when the last straggler had been destroyed did the army return to camp.

Joshua then ordered the mouth of the cave opened, and the five kings brought before him. He had the army assembled and commanded the

captains, or leaders, to put their feet upon the necks of the captives, who were then killed and afterwards hanged upon five trees, where they were left until evening. The story of the five kings who hid in a cave ends in these words:

"And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones in the cave's mouth, which remain until this very day."

The luncheon-bell was ringing as Uncle Jim finished reading the story of the "Five Kings in a Cave," and Betty and Dick sighed regretfully.

"What? Have you lost your appetite?" asked Uncle Jim.

"No," said Dick, "but I'd almost rather listen to another story than eat luncheon."

"What if the waves of the river of Jordan had rushed back when the army was there?"

asked Betty as they slipped into their places at the table.

"They would have been drowned," declared Dick, "for I don't suppose most of them knew how to swim."

"I'd have been afraid to go into the water," said Betty, shuddering.

"I wonder if you would really have been afraid?" It was Mrs. Burroughs' soft voice that interrupted. "Don't you think instead you would have taken it for a sign that God was pleased and that you should trust him?"

Betty and Dick regarded her with thoughtful eyes. It was Betty who answered.

"Why I suppose I would have done just as those folks did," she nodded, "because if I had truly known that God was with me I'd have been as brave as anything."

"There's a moral to this story, isn't there?" asked Dick shrewdly. "It's like 'Æsop's Fables,' only ever so much more exciting."

"Well, son, if there *is* a moral, what is it?" quizzed his father.

"Trust in God," returned Dick promptly.

"If God kept those poor people safe he will certainly look out for father and bring him home to us soon," said Betty softly.

"I'm sure he will, too," agreed Uncle Jim, with a loving, loyal look at Betty's mother.

" 'Perfect love casteth out fear,' " repeated Mrs. Burroughs softly.

And it was with that sweet thought that Uncle Jim, Mrs. Burroughs, Betty and Dick went to sleep that night.

Uncle Jim had hardly seated himself with his paper the next morning when he was imprisoned by two pairs of sturdy arms.

"Now what is it?" he inquired in a resigned tone, but his eyes twinkled.

Betty's little hand caressed his cheek. "Uncle Jim—couldn't you—wouldn't you—read us another Bible story."

"How many stories do you think there are in that book?" grumbled Uncle Jim.

"It's a very thick book," reminded Betty.

"So it is, my wise little lady," laughed Uncle Jim. "Suppose you bring it to me."

The next moment the book was in his hands and the children had settled themselves to hear the story.

"What is it to be about?" asked Dick.

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had settled in the land of Canaan before the time of Abraham. They are believed to have been settlers from Asia Minor, or from some of the islands lying off the coast. They were of great stature, and of warlike habits. Philistia, the home of the formidable enemies of the Israelites, is only another form of the word Palestine.

One of the cities of Philistia was named Gath and was the home of the giant Goliath, whom, years afterwards, David, the Shepherd boy, slew with a pebble from his sling.

At this time there lived in the little town of Zorah, which belonged to the tribe of Dan, a man named Manoah and his wife. Eli was then the high-priest at Shiloh, and the boy Samuel was growing up in the Tabernacle. The Israelites now worshipped idols, and for forty years had been in the hands of the Philistines.

The history of the children of Israel is much like the history of many other children who have been brought up to serve and love God. They disobeyed Him and would have their own

way. They were led astray by many temptations, but mostly by the bad example of those around them. When misfortunes fell upon them, they thought of their sins, became sorry, remembered God, and prayed to Him.

One day an angel appeared to the wife of Manoah, and promised her that she should have a son. He was to be a Nazarite, or one who was dedicated to God by a special vow. "*He shall begin to save Israel out of the hands of the Philistines,*" the angel told the woman, but he must touch no strong drink, and must remain unshaven. Manoah's wife told her husband of the heavenly visitor, and he prayed to God that the angel might return and teach them how to raise the child.

God heard his prayer, and the angel came again as the woman sat in the fields alone. She found her husband and told him that the angel had returned. The messenger repeated the promise, but also told the woman that she must carefully do all that he had commanded on his first visit.

Then Manoah asked the angel to partake of a meal, but the angel would not eat. He told Manoah that if he wished to make a burnt offering, he must do so to God; and when Manoah asked his name, he told him it was Secret, or Wonderful.

Then Manoah offered a kid as a burnt offering to God, upon the rock which he used for an altar, and as the flames arose, the angel wonderfully disappeared. Manoah and his wife fell upon their faces at this miracle, and Manoah feared that after such a vision they might die, but his wife said that if God had intended to kill them He would not have received offerings at their hands, neither would He have told them the things they had just heard.

The angel's promise was fulfilled, for the child came, and was called Samson, which means "little sun" or "sunlike." We read that he grew and that God blessed him.

When Samson had grown to manhood, he left the permanent camp at Kirjath-jearim, where the people of Dan were obliged to live for safety

from the Philistines, and went to Timnath, a town not many miles from his birthplace.

There he saw a young woman who pleased him so much that he wished to marry her. This he told to his father and mother, and asked them, according to the usual custom of the country, to see her parents and arrange the marriage.

Manoah and his wife urged Samson to find a wife among his own people, and not to bring home one who worshipped idols, but Samson would listen to no objections, and at last persuaded his parents to go to Timnath with him, and make the acquaintance of the young woman.

One day when Samson was in the vineyards near Timnath, he met a young lion who roared at him. Samson had no weapon, but a great strength came upon him. He seized the lion and killed it as easily as he would have killed a kid, but he said nothing about it when he returned.

When Samson was on his way to Timnath to be married, he turned aside to see the carcass

of the lion he had slain, and found inside it a swarm of bees and a lot of honey. He ate a part of the honey and gave some to his parents, but he did not tell them where he had found it.

The wedding feast lasted for several days, and there were thirty guests, all young men. During this season of feasting Samson gave these guests a riddle, telling them if they guessed it within seven days, he would give them each a change of linen and a change of garments, but if they failed to guess it in that time, they were each to give the same to him. This was the riddle he gave them:

"Out of the eater came forth meat,
And out of the strong came forth sweetness."

Six days passed away, and they could find no answer, so on the seventh day, the young men went to Samson's wife and besought her to find out the meaning of the riddle and tell it to them. They even threatened that they would burn her and her father's house with fire, if

she would not do this, for they did not want to give Samson the thirty changes of raiment.

So Samson's wife went to him and told him that she was sure he did not love her, because he had told a riddle to her people and had not told it to her. She apparently took it so much to heart that he told her all about it, and then she told the young men. Before the end of the seventh day they had their answer ready. *"What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?"* And Samson replied, *"If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle."*

To pay his wager, Samson went to Askelon, killed thirty Philistines, came back with their garments, and gave them to the wedding guests. Then in anger he went to his house in Zorah, and left his wife at Timnath. After a while his anger cooled, and about harvest time he arrived at Timnath, bringing with him a kid as a present. But the father of his bride would not let him see her, and he determined to be revenged, but on the Philistines.

Samson took a number of jackals, and tied them in pairs with a burning torch fastened between them, and set them down in the dry standing grain, just ready for reaping. In a moment the harvest fields were ablaze; not only the standing grain, but that which had already been cut, was burned, and great damage was done to the olive-trees and vineyards.

When the Philistines found out that this destruction was the work of Samson, they took their revenge by burning Samson's wife and her father, and this was the very punishment his wife had sought to avoid by betraying the secret of the riddle. But Samson avenged the death of his wife and her father, by slaying the perpetrators of the deed and hewing them in pieces.

After he had done this he went into the country belonging to the tribe of Judah, and made his home on the top of a rocky knoll, called Etam.

Then the Philistines sent an armed force to the men of Judah, and when they were asked

their errand, they said that they had come to bind Samson and to kill him. Then three thousand of the men of Judah went to the top of the rock where Samson lived, and told him that because the Philistines were their rulers, they were going to bind him and deliver him into their hands. Samson consented on their promise not to do him any harm themselves.

So Samson was bound with new and very strong cords, and taken to the Philistines' tents; and so great was their joy at seeing him in this condition that they raised a great shout. But the wonderful strength God had given Samson made their triumph a short one, for he broke the cords that bound him like so many thin threads.

Then, seeing the jaw-bone of a donkey which was lying near him, he slew with it a thousand of his panic-stricken foes. Then he threw away the jaw-bone and called the place Ramath-lehi. Being ready to perish from thirst, he prayed to God for water, and God caused a spring of water to spring up from which he was revived.

The Israelites appreciated the great deed

which Samson had done, and made him a judge over them, a position which he held for thirty years.

In spite of Samson's position of honor and responsibility, he did not lead a good life. He had marvelous muscular strength, but was weak against temptation. Although he had strangled a lion, he could not restrain his own animal nature, and although he had burst the bands of his foes, he could not conquer his own self-will.

Samson went often to the Philistine city of Gaza, and there he fell into bad company. Learning that he was there at a certain time, the Philistines plotted to capture him when he left the city in the morning. But Samson rose at midnight, wrenched the immense gates of the city from their hinges, put them on his shoulders and carried them away.

One of Samson's friends was a beautiful, but deceitful, woman named Delilah. As she had a great influence over Samson, the chiefs of the Philistines offered her a sum of money if she would persuade him to tell her the secret of his

strength. Anxious to obtain the reward, Delilah tried several times to induce Samson to tell her wherein his great strength lay.

The first time he told her that if he should be bound with seven green withes—new cords of undried flax fibres—he would become weak, and no stronger than an ordinary man. So Delilah bound him securely with seven green withes and then cried out, "The Philistines be upon thee!" But Samson broke the withes with the utmost ease, and the Philistines who were ready to seize him if the bonds had held, were disappointed.

The second time Delilah tried to find out the secret of his strength, Samson told her that he could be held by new ropes of twisted hemp. The new ropes were procured, and Samson was bound with them, but when Delilah again said, "The Philistines be upon thee," he broke the ropes as though they were sewing threads.

Once more Delilah begged Samson to tell her the truth about his strength, and this time he told her to weave his hair into the loom at

which she worked. Delilah did this, and fastened it securely. Then at her cry of "The Philistines be upon thee," Samson awoke from the sleep into which he had fallen, and carried away not only the cloth into which his hair had been woven, but heavy parts of the loom itself.

Still determined to win the reward for capturing Samson, Delilah gave him no peace. She told him he had mocked her three times, and kept on worrying him until at last he told her the truth. *"If I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak."*

Delilah saw her way clearly then. She lulled him to sleep, and then had a man come in and shave his head. Samson awoke and found his strength gone. He had broken his vow, and in consequence the Philistines made him a prisoner.

They put out his eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and took him to Gaza. There he was put into prison and made to grind corn like a common slave or criminal. But while he was

doing this work, his hair grew again and his terrible strength returned.

At one time, a great gathering of the Philistines, including their chiefs, was held to honor their god Dagon, whom they worshipped in the form of a great fish with human hands, feet, and body. They believed that Dagon had delivered Samson into their hands, and the blind prisoner was led out and shown to the people, who praised their god when they saw their helpless captive.

At a similar feast the people demanded that Samson be brought out to make sport for them. So Samson was led into the great temple of Dagon, where a vast throng was assembled. A special place was reserved for the lords, or chiefs, the inner part of the building was thronged with men and women, and upon the roof that covered a part of the open space of the temple, three thousand people had gathered to watch the feats of the blind man.

Samson was led in by a lad, and made to stand between the main pillars that supported

the roof. He asked the lad to let him touch the pillars with his hands, and as he did so he prayed to God:

"O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes."

Then Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which held up the temple, and crying out, "Let me die with the Philistines," bowed himself with all his might. The pillars gave way, the roof fell in, and the lords and all the people below were crushed to death. So Samson at his death slew more than he had slain during his life. He perished in that ruined temple of Dagon by his own act. So terrible was the calamity that his relatives were allowed to take the body of Samson and bury it in the tomb of his father Manoah, in the territory of Dan.

Dick and Betty were delighted with the story, but Dick objected to one thing.

"I never heard of asking a riddle about something nobody else knew about but yourself. I don't think it was fair. No wonder the people couldn't answer it."

"Still it wasn't very fair in the people to try to find out the answer the way they did," returned Uncle Jim." "I don't believe they even tried to think of it themselves."

"I thought the way this story began," said Betty, "that Samson was going to be a good man. I wouldn't call him good."

"But he became good before he died. It would have been much better if he had been good always, but he made up in the end: don't you think so?" asked her uncle.

"He must have been pretty brave," said Dick, "when his eyes were put out, to pull down the pillars. He just couldn't escape when he couldn't see."

"I wonder," said Betty, looking very earnest, "if I had my curls cut off so they'd never have to be curled again, what would happen?"

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A FARMER'S WIFE

THE STORY OF RUTH.

IN the district called Ephrath, belonging to the tribe of Judah, stood the city of Bethlehem, or "house of bread." It was a city with walls and gates, and lay between fruitful hills and well-watered valleys. There among pleasant cornfields and pasture lands lived a

man named Elimelech, which means "my God is my King." He was descended from one of the princes of Judah, and was a man of means and consequence.

Elimelech's wife was named Naomi, meaning "pleasant," and they had two sons whose names were Mahlon and Chilion. This old and noble family lived in this fertile region, amid pleasant surroundings, and with happy prospects, until one of the frequent famines that were brought on by want of rain visited their district.

Leaving the parched and sterile fields around Bethlehem, Elimelech, his family and his flocks, left their home and settled in the rich and well-watered lands of the Moabites, beyond the Jordan. As a wealthy foreigner, he probably was well received by the people of Moab, and secured good pastorage for his sheep and cattle.

But much trouble was in store for the family, notwithstanding its wealth had enabled them to leave their own famine-stricken lands. First

Elimelech died, and the family was without a head.

Then Mahlon married a beautiful woman of the country in which he was then living, named Ruth, and his brother Chilion married another named Orpah.

After a while both of the sons of Naomi died, and she was left a childless widow in a strange land. By her gracious ways she had won the affection of both Ruth and Orpah, and now sorrow locked their hearts together in sympathy. At length, Naomi turned her longing eyes to her old home in Bethlehem. Ten years had come and gone since she left it, and now the news had reached her that there was plenty of food there.

Naomi and her two daughters-in-law started on their way to the land of Judah. After a while, thinking that they had accompanied her far enough, Naomi bade Ruth and Orpah return to their own mothers' homes, and spoke very kindly to them. She kissed them and would have taken leave of them, but they in-

sisted that they would go with her to the home of her own people.

Then Naomi suggested that they would not be welcome at Bethlehem because they were Moabites. They would be looked upon with reproach, strangers in a strange land, and again she pleaded with them to go home, lest their love for her should prove a sorrow to them.

Orpah was persuaded to return and settle down among her kindred, and probably did so from a sense of duty; but Ruth would not leave Naomi, although her mother-in-law gave her one more opportunity to go back to Moab.

The chief cause for separation, according to Naomi, was, not that they belonged to different races, but that they did not worship the same God. But Ruth, in words at once pathetic and sincere, unselfish in spirit and expression, declared her resolve.

"Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy

God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

Ruth gave up father and mother, friends and relatives, religion and country, and chose poverty and a life among strangers because of her love for Naomi, and her trust in Naomi's God. They reached Bethlehem about the beginning of the barley harvest, and secured some kind of a home.

The city of Bethlehem was stirred by the return of Naomi. She had left them accompanied by husband and sons, and in prosperity. She returned, altered in circumstances, changed in appearance, and accompanied only by a Moabitish woman.

Her friends could hardly believe their eyes, and exclaimed, "Is this Naomi?" To which she would reply, "Call me not Naomi, 'pleasant,' call me Mara, 'bitter,' for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." There was much surprise shown at the return of Naomi

with Ruth, but there is no record that people were helpful or even kind to them, and probably the first thing they had to do was to secure food.

As it was harvest time, Ruth volunteered to go into the fields and glean, and so, one morning, she went forth as an alien, among strangers, to find bread for the two. She came to one of the fields of Boaz, a man of wealth and position, and a kinsman of Elimelech, and asked permission to glean among the sheaves.

In the glory of the early morning, a band of reapers were cutting the bearded barley with their sickles. Behind them, women bound the grain in sheaves, and behind these workers were a group of gleaners, made up from the aged and the young.

Ruth took her place among the gleaners, and bending her back like the rest gathered the stray ears left by the binders.

As the day advanced, Boaz entered the field with the salutation to his men, "The Lord be with you." They replied, "The Lord bless

thee." Then glancing around the field, Boaz saw Ruth among the gleaners and asked the overseer who she was. The overseer replied that she was the Moabitish woman who came back with Naomi, and that she had asked permission to gather the barley ears with the rest of the gleaners.

Boaz was interested at once, and, struck by Ruth's modesty and beauty, he went to her and said she was not to glean in any other fields but his all the time of harvest. He told her she need fear no rudeness from the young men, for he had laid his commands upon them not to molest or offend her. He also told her that when she was thirsty she was to drink of what had been prepared for the reapers.

Ruth was deeply touched by this slight kindness. Bowing to the ground she asked why it was that she, a stranger, had found grace in his sight. Boaz replied that he had learned of her loving treatment of Naomi, since the death of her husband, and how she had left her father and her mother, and the land where she was

born, to live with her mother-in-law; and then he invoked the blessing of God upon her and upon her work.

The sympathy and sincerity of Boaz were very grateful to Ruth. She was comforted as well, for she knew that he had recognized her goodness to Naomi, and knew that she had come to trust in the care of God.

At meal time Boaz invited her to eat with the reapers, and even handed food to her himself. After the simple meal was eaten and Ruth was again among the gleaners, Boaz told the reapers to let her glean wherever she chose, and to drop some of the grain on purpose for her, so that her work might be lightened.

As the sun began to set, all went their homeward way, and when Ruth reached her home she beat out all the ears of barley she had gleaned and found there were three pecks of barley, about ten times as much as a single Israelite's daily portion of manna while wandering in the wilderness. Her first day's work had secured provision for several days to come.

When Naomi saw what a quantity of barley Ruth had brought home, she asked in whose field she had gleaned. Then Ruth related all the events of the day, and how Boaz had been kind to her.

It pleased Naomi to hear that Boaz had shown kindness to Ruth and to her, because he was a relation of her husband, and one whose duty it was to care for a widow, and one who had a right to help them by law. Such a relative was called a goel, meaning a "redeemer."

So the days of the harvest passed. Every day Ruth gleaned in the fields, and at night returned to Naomi. Each day she kept close by the maidens of Boaz, through the barley harvest, and then to the last ingathering of the wheat.

The harvest finished, the threshing of the grain began. Naomi was anxious that the "redeemer" should exercise his right. According to Israelitish law, when a man died and left his wife childless, his nearest of kin was to take the widow to be his wife, and any son born

of this marriage should inherit the name and possessions of the first husband.

In this way he kept his brother's name and inheritance from being blotted out. Naomi saw with thankfulness that Divine Love had led Ruth to the protection of her rightful guardian.

So Naomi planned how Ruth should have an opportunity of speaking to Boaz. She told her to take off the sign of her mourning and widowhood, and go to the threshing-floor when the grain was beaten out.

These threshing-floors were either natural spaces of rock, or open places covered with large flat stones, so that the grain could be readily separated from the husk without waste, and the chaff easily blown away.

The sheaves of grain were spread on these places, and a wooden sledge, covered with iron teeth, was dragged over them by oxen until all the grain had fallen from the dry ears. It was a joyful time, the oxen were not muzzled, so they could eat while they worked, and the master and his servants feasted.

Naomi told Ruth to go to the threshing-floor of Boaz, and speak to him during the night. Ruth did as she was told, and at the proper time told Boaz that he had the right to redeem her. Boaz was pleased, and told her that he would do as she had said.

But he reminded her that while he was her kinsman, there was another who was nearer. He would see this man in the morning, and if he would not exercise his right as "redeemer," he would perform the part of a kinsman himself. He told her to lie quietly down until morning, and when it was nearly sunrise he poured into the veil or cloak that she wore, six measures of barley, and sent her home to Naomi.

Ruth went on her way in the dusk of dawn. When she reached home, Naomi's first question was, "How hast thou fared, my daughter?" Then Ruth told her all that Boaz had said and done, and how he had given her the barley, saying as he did so, "Go not empty to thy mother-in-law." Naomi was pleased, and so said:

"Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how

the matter will fare; for the man will not rest until he have finished the thing this day."

In Palestine, nearly every town, and many villages, were surrounded by walls, and at the main entrances there were deep gateways which generally had broad and shady spaces in front, where people frequently met.

These gates became the chief places of interest. They were often arched over and used as watch towers; they became the guard-house, business was transacted there, and in this way they became markets.

People met in the city gates to discuss the news of the day, and proclamations were made there. Kings and rulers gave audience there, and being a place of general resort, the elders sat there to dispense justice.

In the morning, then, Boaz went to the gateway of the city of Bethlehem, ready to fulfill his pledge to Ruth. As he sat there, the man who was the nearest relative of Elimelech passed by. Boaz summoned him to a seat by himself, using the legal form of expression by

which he would understand that there was special business to be transacted.

Then the elders, or wise and respected citizens were asked to hear Boaz's case, and to be at once judges and responsible witnesses, and to ratify the proceedings. In their presence, and in the hearing of the people who gathered near, Boaz stated the facts, saying to the "redeemer":

"Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, seeketh the parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's: and I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people."

And then Boaz went on and asked the man if he would redeem it, and the man said that he would do so. He further explained to him the customs and conditions of the law, and told him if he took the land he must also take Ruth the Moabitess to be his wife.

But this was a part of the bargain that the man did not want to perform, so he turned his right of redemption over to Boaz, giving as his

reason, that he would not mind buying the field if it would become his own personal property, but if he should marry Ruth the field he bought would not belong to him; and so he would have paid out money for something which would bring him little or no benefit.

It is not at all unlikely that he refused to marry Ruth because she was a Moabitess.

When the man had announced his decision, it was confirmed by the usual custom in all cases of redeeming and exchanging. The one giving up the claim took off his sandal and gave it to the one who received the claim.

In this way the unnamed kinsman of Elimelech refused to redeem Ruth and her land, and as a proof of it he drew off his sandal and handed it to Boaz before the ten elders and all the people, thus transferring to him the legal right to be the "redeemer."

Boaz then called all present to witness that he had that day bought all that was Elimelech's and Chilion's and Mahlon's, and also that Ruth the Moabitess was to be his wife.

And because Boaz had acted so honorably, all present united in asking the blessing of God upon his marriage. So, with the approval and best wishes of his neighbors and friends, and above all with the blessing of God, Boaz and Ruth were married.

The story of Ruth is a beautiful one, for it shows how the sacrifice and service of love was rewarded. Naomi in her old age and declining days was made glad, and the alien found a happy home. In time a son was born to Boaz and Ruth, and the name of "Obed," or "the serving one," was given to it. This boy grew up to be the father of Jesse, whose son was the mightiest of Israel's kings.

When Ruth's baby boy was born, the matrons of Bethlehem congratulated Naomi, who became the child's nurse. The boy grew up to be the joy of his parents and the comfort of his adopted grandmother, and in time the ancestor of Mary the mother of Jesus.

The Saviour of the world, then, sprang from the tribe of Judah, and from the Gentiles, as

they are called in the New Testament, through Ruth the Moabitess.

The memory of the faithful, loving Ruth has been a sweet and living picture for many centuries. She left her home, her friends, her all, to be kind and good to her broken-hearted mother-in-law, and to serve God, and found much more than she gave up. She brought consolation to Naomi, there came to her love, prosperity, and peace, and through her children's children, Jesus the Christ.

"My but that was a nice story," sighed Betty. "I think Ruth was splendid. Naomi must have felt happy when Ruth said, 'thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"

"I expect she was surprised," said Dick thoughtfully. "She supposed Ruth would want to go back home with Orpah, her other daughter. Ruth wasn't the least bit lazy though. She was willing to work, wasn't she?"

"She was indeed," agreed Uncle Jim, with a sidelong glance at Mrs. Burroughs, who had entered the living-room in time to hear the discussion of Uncle Jim's story.

"If Ruth hadn't gone with Naomi she wouldn't have met Boaz and they wouldn't have loved each other and been married. They might never have seen each other at all," declared Betty. "It was because Ruth was good and kind and not a bit selfish that everything turned out so well for her."

"It was because God was on her side," stated Dick with sudden positiveness. "If Ruth and Naomi hadn't loved God and trusted Him they wouldn't have got very far I guess."

"You are right, Dickie," said his father, placing his hand on his son's shoulder. "Just remember that none of us can get very far along in life if God isn't on our side. Now story time is over for to-day."

"How about to-morrow?" queried Dick.

"To-morrow morning after breakfast, if you're good," promised Uncle Jim.

"What will the story be about?" quizzed Betty.

"About the wisest man in the world."

"Oh, I know who he was," cried Dick. "Solomon."

"So he was," returned Uncle Jim. "Now run along both of you and don't say story to me again to-day."

"Solomon's next!" called Betty down the hall to her cousin on the following morning.

Mrs. Burroughs caught her brother's hand as he rose from the breakfast table.

"I don't know how you've done it," she said, "but the children will talk of nothing but your stories."

"Well," said Uncle Jim, "I came here for a rest, and rest doesn't mean reading stories to two youngsters at all hours of the day, but I believe its taught me as much as its taught them. I never really knew myself how exciting Bible stories could be."

He paused as he heard three cheers given for himself in Betty's high voice and Dick's gruffer one. Then, "Un-cle-Jim! Un-cle-Jim! Un-cle-Jim!"

"You will have to excuse me," he said. "There's no living in the house with them without yielding."

And five minutes later he had begun to read to his appreciative little audience the story of "The Wisest Man."

THE WISEST MAN

THE STORY OF SOLOMON

FOR a better understanding of events in the life of the great Hebrew monarch whom we call "The Wisest Man," it is well to recall a portion of the reign of King David, his father.

The city of Jerusalem, in Palestine, the most important city that has ever existed on the earth, was originally called Jebus. It was a stronghold of the Jebusites, a small, but very

brave tribe of Canaanites. In the distribution of the land of Canaan among the Israelites, their part of the country was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, but the city itself successfully resisted the attacks of Joshua and other Israelitish leaders, and was only conquered by King David.

The capture of the city was made possible by a daring feat performed by Joab, a nephew of King David. Inspired by the proclamation that the position of commander-in-chief, or "captain of the host," would be given to the man who would first scale the walls of the city, Joab set out to climb the steep and slippery rocks upon which they were perched.

It was a difficult and dangerous task, but Joab was able to accomplish it. Other bold climbers followed him, and the citadel was taken.

Previous to the capture of Jebus, David had reigned seven and a half years at Hebron, a very ancient city, older even than the venerable cities of Egypt. To us this city is one of many memories. Not far from its walls stood the

great oak tree under which Abraham pitched his tent. From there he went forth to rescue his nephew Lot from the chieftains who had taken him captive in the battle of the four kings against the five. To the same place came the three angels with the good tidings that Abraham was to be the father of Isaac; and it was in the cave of Machpelah, near Hebron, that Abraham buried his wife Sarah.

King David now established his residence and court at Jebus, and it came to be known as "the city of David." Later, it took the name of Jerusalem, which means, "The foundation of peace," or, "The firmly founded city of peace." Impressed by the capture of the famous fortress, Hiram, king of Tyre, soon established an alliance with David, and celebrated it by a splendid present of cedar trees for the building of the new city upon which David had determined, and especially for the building of David's own palace.

King David's next care was to bring the Ark of the Covenant from Kirjath-jearim to the

sheltering walls of Jerusalem. A Tabernacle was accordingly prepared for it, and arrangements made for a solemn and ceremonious reception. When all was ready the Ark was placed upon a new cart, and the procession set forth, King David and a great company conducting it on its way with holy dances and great gladness.

Coming to a rough place in the road, the oxen that drew the cart stumbled, and Uzza, one of their drivers, put out his hand and touched the Ark to steady it. It was a very serious offence for anyone except the priests to touch this sacred object, and Uzza was punished for his action by losing his life. Instead of taking the Ark to Jerusalem, after this occurrence it was taken to the house of a man named Obed-edom, but eventually it was borne reverently to the new capital of the nation, on the shoulders of the priests, and installed in the Tabernacle.

The Ark once safely established in Jerusalem, David's heart overflowed with joy and gratitude. He longed to build a stately temple

for the worship of God, wherein the Ark might have a fitting resting place.

He prayed that he might be able to do this, but in reply God told him through the prophet Nathan that, because he had engaged in numerous wars, and had shed much blood, a house dedicated to God could not be built by him. He was comforted, however, by the assurance that the honor denied to him should be granted to a son of his, whose reign should owe its peace to his father's conquests.

David's surrender of the glory and assumption of the work of building the Temple is one of the most beautiful things in history. Instead of leaving all the work to be done by the son who was to succeed him, he set himself to the task of gathering costly materials for the building and adornment of the house of God.

His example and exhortations to the people caused them to contribute willingly immense sums of money, and various materials, such as costly cedar wood, hewn stone, iron, brass, gold, silver, and precious stones. This done David

died *"in a good old age, full of days, riches and honors, and Solomon, his son, reigned in his stead."*

Solomon was the child of David's old age. His mother's name was Bathsheba. From his earliest infancy he appears to have been placed under the care of the prophet Nathan, but there is nothing in the Bible narration to indicate a purpose on David's part to make him his heir, until after the death of his brother Absalom. Then David pledged his word to Bathsheba that Solomon should be the heir to the throne. Solomon was about ten years old when the revolt of Absalom occurred, and probably shared his father's exile during that event.

Adonijah, another son of David, was the next in succession after Absalom, and had a considerable following among the aged king's counselors and friends. In fact, he usurped the kingdom, but Nathan the prophet reminded Bathsheba of David's promise regarding Solomon and counselled her to attend to the matter at once. She did so and obtained from her hus-

band a confirmation of his promise that Solomon should succeed him.

Zadok the priest at once anointed Solomon King of Israel, and he was proclaimed as such. At the death of David Solomon became king.

The new monarch appears to have been possessed of a far-reaching intellect, a ready sympathy, and a ready humor. Besides, he had, as well, more than an average share of good looks. The accumulated treasures of years were at his disposal. He adopted a conciliatory policy toward neighboring nations, and ratified an alliance with Pharaoh, King of Egypt, by marrying his daughter.

The city of Gibeon was one of two holy places which divided the reverence of the Israelites. The original Tabernacle, which had accompanied their fathers during the years of wandering in the wilderness, was located there. At Jerusalem was the temporary Tabernacle erected by King David as a home for the Ark of the Covenant.

Having offered sacrifices at Jerusalem, Solo-

mon went to Gibeon, and there sacrificed a thousand burnt offerings. While in this place God appeared to him in spirit, asking what He should give him. Instead of asking for great riches, honors, a long life, and victory over enemies, Solomon asked that he might have a "*wise and understanding heart,*" so that he might govern and judge his people wisely, discerning between good and evil. God was pleased with Solomon's reply to His question, and in addition to wisdom, gave him riches and honors.

In the early part of Solomon's reign two women came to him, told him that they lived in the same house, and that each of them had a young child. But one of them then went on to say that the child belonging to the other had died during the night, and that the mother had taken away her living child while she was sleeping, and had placed the dead child by her side. The other woman denied the act, and declared that the living child was her own. Their appeal to the king was for a decision as to who should possess the living child.

Solomon's decision was that the child should be cut in two pieces by a sword, and that each woman should have half of its body. One of the women heard the command unmoved, while the other begged that the life of the child might be spared, even though it must be given to her rival. Solomon gave the child to the tender-hearted woman whom he had thus discerned to be its mother.

Besides being master of all the learning of his day, Solomon possessed a wide general knowledge. His wealth equaled his wisdom, and his magnificence has become a proverb. He opened communication by sea with various distant countries, bringing into his own all kinds of foreign products hitherto unknown to the Israelites. Ivory, precious stones, foreign spices, apes and peacocks were among them.

There was such a profusion of gold in Jerusalem that silver was held in slight estimation. The gold was brought into the kingdom from Ophir—probably a city, or region, in Arabia—and from Tarshish, which is generally consid-

ered to have been a city in the south of Spain, much frequented by the Phœnicians, who were a great commercial people.

New customs were continually introduced. Chariot wheels were heard for the first time in the streets of Jerusalem, and horsemen, or cavalry, were added to the army. To support all this magnificence, the people were heavily taxed. Every province contributed to the support of the king's enormous household. His horses alone required forty thousand stalls; while sixty of the tallest and handsomest men in the kingdom continually attended him as his bodyguard.

Tribute was also paid by the kings and princes of surrounding provinces, and the sale of monopolies of trade contributed, as well, to swell the national revenues, all of which went to support the indescribable magnificence of King Solomon's court.

In the fourth year of his reign, and with the assistance of his father's old friend and ally, Hiram, King of Tyre, Solomon began the erec-

tion of the magnificent Temple. The site was the one selected by King David, and had formerly been the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, one of the old inhabitants of Jerusalem and not unlikely the chief of his tribe, and was on Mount Moriah.

In thanksgiving for the cessation of a terrible pestilence that had fallen upon the land, David, instructed to do so by the prophet Gad, went to this spot to build an altar and offer sacrifices in commemoration of God's mercy. Ornan saw the king approaching and bowed humbly before him. David then told him that he wished to buy the threshing-floor that he might set up the altar there. Ornan offered it as a free gift, with the oxen, the yoke, and the threshing-sledge as well, but David would not accept the gift, and paid him well for all.

Upon this spot the Temple was built. It required seven and a half years to complete it, and when finished it was the most beautiful building that had ever been made. It was built of cedar wood covered with gold and every-

thing in it which was used in the service of God was made of pure gold.

As in the Tabernacle erected by Moses, the Temple consisted of three parts, the Porch, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. Two magnificent pillars of brass supported the front of the Porch, and were called respectively Jachin and Boaz. The Altar of Incense was kept in the Holy Place, and the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

The cedar wood used in the construction of the Temple came from the forests of Lebanon, a mountain range in the north of Palestine. It was conveyed in floats, or rafts, by sea to Joppa by the servants of Solomon and Hiram, and from thence across the country to Jerusalem. Cedar wood has always been held in the highest estimation, and has furnished many curious legends.

One of the legends relates that the original tree first stood in the Garden of Eden. After Adam's disobedience it died, but Seth, Adam's third son, placed three seeds from it in his

father's grave. Abraham, Moses and David carefully protected the trees which sprang from these seeds. After they had been removed to Jerusalem, the Psalms were composed beneath them, and in due time, when they had grown together and had become one giant tree, it was felled by Solomon that it might be preserved forever in the Temple.

But no one was able to manage the mighty beam. It was placed in position, but proved to be too long. A portion was then sawed from it, and then it was too small. Evidently it was intended for a more sacred purpose, and so was laid aside in the Temple. It became a bridge over the ravine Kidron near Jerusalem, and later was thrown into the Pool of Bethesda, proving to be the cause of its healing virtues. It then became the cross upon which Jesus was crucified, was afterwards buried, exhumed by the orders of the Empress Helena, and eventually chopped up and distributed among the churches of the time. A few very ancient trees are even now

shown as having existed in the days of Solomon.

The dedication of the Temple was perhaps the grandest ceremony in the history of the Israelitish race, and the Temple itself was regarded as the crowning glory of the nation. It was dedicated with immense pomp and glory, and its splendor has wafted Solomon's name to the ends of the earth.

After blessing the immense concourse of people who were present, Solomon kneeled upon a platform of brass, and poured forth one of the most sublime prayers to God that has ever fallen from the lips of mortal man. Then fire from heaven came down and consumed the sacrifice that had been prepared, and "*the glory of the Lord filled the house.*"

Twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred and seventy thousand sheep were sacrificed before the rites were over. When all was completed, God appeared to Solomon by night, and told him that He had heard his prayer, and had accepted the Temple as a house of worship.

He told him that He was always ready to hear his prayers, and the prayers of his people. He promised national prosperity in return for right doing, and named the penalty for departing from His service.

The influence of Solomon's magnificence upon the surrounding nations was powerful. The fame of his riches, glory and wisdom was carried everywhere. Embassies, deputations, monarchs themselves, visited Jerusalem to confirm the rumors of his grandeur, and to look upon the wise king.

The most conspicuous instance was the visit of the Queen of Sheba, an Arabian princess. Her name, according to the legends of her country, was Belkis, and there is good reason for believing that her descendants have survived as kings of Abyssinia. She came with a great caravan of camels, laden with gold, and precious stones, and spices, as gifts for Solomon. Then, too, she had heard of his great wisdom, and wished to test it with hard questions.

She was received with great honors, and after

she had seen the Temple, the palace, the court and had listened to Solomon's wisdom, she went back to her own country, confessing that the rumors she had heard were not one-half of the reality.

Solomon reigned over Israel for forty years, and was succeeded by his son Rehoboam. Innumerable legends have been preserved regarding him, but they are as fantastic as the one related of the cedar tree. Among other books in the Bible, he has given us the Book of Proverbs, and we find in them the practical, prudent manner of thought and expression that have earned for him the name of "The Wisest Man."

Uncle Jim looked at the two children as he finished reading.

"Well," he asked, "how did you like Solomon?"

"He was a good king," conceded Betty, rather slowly.

"David must have been sorry he couldn't help to begin to build the Temple," remarked Dick. "He was so anxious to see how it would look."

"It was nice in him to gather the gold and wood and silver for it when he knew he'd never live to see it. I like David much better than Solomon, even if he was so wise. David was more like a real person," said Betty stoutly.

"I think Solomon was the best," argued Dick. "I wish *I* knew more than any one else in the world. I wish I had been alive when Solomon was. Then I could have seen the Temple and the Queen of Sheba."

"I almost wish I'd lived then, too," sighed Betty.

"Hm," said Dick, "we'd be good and old. Acres and acres of people have died since then, and of all that's living now that was alive then are only a few old trees."

"Those trees must know a lot," Betty declared. "They must have seen plenty of strange things happen."

"Yes," said Uncle Jim, "but to-morrow I am going to tell you about a man who has lived as long as those trees—for he never died at all!"

The next morning the children were kept indoors by a heavy rainstorm.

"It's raining as though it wasn't ever going to stop," complained Dick as he stood staring gloomily out the living-room window. I can't do any playing outdoors to-day."

"Maybe it will clear up before noon," smiled Mrs. Burroughs. "Don't you remember the little saying, 'Rain before seven, clear before eleven.'?"

"We don't care if it rains this morning, because Uncle Jim is going to read to us about 'The Man Who Did Not Die,'" announced Betty. "Let's go and hunt him now and march him in here for our story."

The two children scampered upstairs to their uncle's room. The door stood partly open.

Dick peeped in. "He isn't there. He must be downstairs somewhere."

When they reached the lower hall they spied him sitting calmly in his big chair in the living-room, the cherished story book in his hand.

"I fooled you that time. I got here first," he called.

"Where were you?" chorused the children pouncing upon him.

"Behind the alcove curtains peeping out at you. I waited till you ran upstairs because I thought I'd save you the trouble of reminding me of my story duty. You see I'm all ready for you."

"You're a dear." Betty rubbed her soft cheek against Uncle Jim's.

"So are you," he replied, hugging his fair-haired little niece.

"All ready for the story," sang out Dick.

"All ready," echoed Betty, hastily slipping into her own particular chair.

Then Uncle Jim read the story of "The Man Who Did Not Die."

THE MAN WHO DID NOT DIE.

AFTER the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam became ruler of the Israelites. The prodigality and magnificence of Solomon's court, and his lavish way of living had been met by heavy taxation. Seeing the vast revenues of the kingdom employed in this way, the people had grown discontented, and then disloyal.

After Rehoboam had become king, the Israelites appealed to him to lighten the taxes and other heavy burdens which oppressed the poor, but he scornfully rejected the petition of his subjects.

A very ambitious man named Jeroboam presented the petition to Rehoboam, and upon its rejection, ten tribes revolted and made Jeroboam King of Israel.

The remainder of the Israelitish nation from this time were known as the Kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem remained its capital, and God was worshipped in the temple built by Solomon.

Among the twenty sovereigns of Judah, there were a few who served God sincerely. The best four of the kings were Asa, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah. Asa fought against the worship of idols which had corrupted the people, yet he made an alliance with the King of Syria, who was an idolater. Jehosaphat, his son, ruled the kingdom of Judah for twenty-five years, and, although he did not always do right, his reign was a quiet one.

Hezekiah waged a vigorous war against the worship of idols, and, as far as he was able, restored the worship of God in the temple. The Bible says of everything he undertook for the glory of God that *"he did it with all his heart, and prospered."*

Hezekiah was not only a very brave man, but a good man as well.

The prophet Isaiah lived during the reign of Hezekiah. At one time when the king was very sick he prayed to God that his life might be spared. God told Isaiah to tell him that He had heard his prayer, and that He would heal him, and prolong his life for fifteen years.

When Isaiah had delivered God's message, Hezekiah asked for a sign that these things should be done, and Isaiah said that he might decide whether the shadow upon the sundial should go forward or go backward ten degrees.

Hezekiah replied that it was an easy thing for the shadow to go forward ten degrees, and asked that it might go backwards. God moved the shadow as the king had asked, and he ac-

cepted it as a sign that his life was to be spared.

Josiah was only eight years old when he came to the throne of Judah. He served God while yet a child, and devoted his life to His service. He reigned for more than thirty years, and was killed at last by an arrow while fighting against Necho, King of Egypt.

In spite of the repeated warnings of God's prophets, the people continued to worship idols, until as a punishment the kingdom was entirely broken up. After a siege lasting sixteen months, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, took the city of Jerusalem, burned the Temple, and carried away as prisoners all the inhabitants who had survived the horrors of the siege. This was the end of the Kingdom of Judah, and the beginning of "the captivity."

There were nineteen Kings of Israel in all, and city after city became the capital of the kingdom, until in the time of its sixth king Samaria became the seat of government.

Omri was the king who built Samaria. The monarchs who preceded him were conspicuous

for evil doing, but Omri exceeded them in wickedness. The reign of his son Ahab was worse.

Ahab married Jezebel, a Phœnician princess, and this was the crowning point of his sinful career. Jezebel was unprincipled and intolerant, and as Ahab was a weak man, he became little more than a tool in her hands. She introduced at once the worship of Baal and Ashtoroth, gods of her own country.

Not content with introducing this heathen worship, Jezebel persecuted the few among the nation who remained faithful to the worship of God. She caused their altars to be destroyed, and to save their lives they fled to the wildest solitudes, and hid in caves.

While all this was taking place, and while Ahab was occupying himself with the building of a splendid palace at Jezreel, a new and startling figure appeared upon the scene. None knew whence the mysterious stranger came, as, wrapped in a rough cape, or mantle, of sheepskin, he confronted the astonished king.

The name of this strange visitor was Elijah,

a man of whom it has been said that he was "the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced."

Elijah was one of God's prophets, and his mission was to announce to Ahab that a judgment was about to fall upon the land, because the people had forsaken the worship of God, and bowed down to idols instead. This punishment was to be in the shape of a drought, at all times a terrible infliction, but especially so in Eastern countries where all vegetation quickly dries up when there is a scarcity of water.

Elijah's message was very brief, and before the king had recovered from his astonishment, the prophet had departed as abruptly as he had appeared.

We have no record that Elijah had any settled home. He moved from place to place, at God's command. Now, as he left Ahab, God's word came to him, directing him to turn to the eastward, and hide by the brook Cherith.

Elijah stayed in this retreat, the stream affording him water to drink, and he was fed by

ravens, who, twice each day, brought him bread and meat. After a while the brook dried up, and the leaves which had protected him from the fierce sun shriveled and fell to the ground, for the promised drought was upon the land.

Again the word of God came upon Elijah, telling him what road to take to his next shelter. Across the mountains of Lebanon, where the brooks were as dry as that of Cherith, the prophet made his way. Descending their further slopes, he crossed the plains at their feet, and with his face still towards the sea, approached the village or town of Zarephath. The modern village of Sura-flud is supposed to occupy its site, and the ruins of the ancient town are to be seen there.

Elijah was now in Phœnicia, the native country of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. It would seem to be the last place in which an enemy of Baal would seek refuge, but Elijah knew that God had a purpose in sending him there. Ethbaal, the father of Jezebel, was the King of Phœnicia, and the famine which followed the

drought had reached that country, and was causing terrible suffering.

Just outside Zarephath, Elijah found a woman gathering sticks for firewood. She was a widow, and in such poverty that all the food she had in the world was a handful of meal and a little oil in a bottle or jar. Consumed with thirst, Elijah asked her for water, and, as she turned to bring it, he asked her also for a piece of bread.

Sadly the woman told him she had no bread. She was gathering sticks to make a fire over which she would cook the handful of meal and the little oil remaining in the bottle. When she and her son had eaten this, they would have no more food, and in consequence would die of hunger.

It is probable that this woman was an Israelite, and not a worshipper of Baal, for, when Elijah told her to mix the meal and oil into a cake and bake it for him, adding, "*For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil*

fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth," the woman did as she was told, evidently recognizing him as a prophet of God. She fed him before she and her son tasted of food, and gave him the shelter of her house as well; and during all the time of drought and famine, the supply of meal and oil never failed. The widow and her son never went hungry.

After a while, trouble came upon the little household. The widow's son suddenly became very sick and then died. The heartbroken mother demanded of Elijah why he had come to them only to slay her son. The prophet replied, *"Give me thy son,"* and taking the boy from his mother's arms, carried him into his own chamber and laid him on the bed. Though the boy was dead Elijah believed that God could give him life again.

Then Elijah called upon God, and prayed that the child might be made alive again, and God heard his prayer, for the boy sat up alive and well. Taking him in his arms, the prophet carried the child to his mother, who was so

happy that she exclaimed, *Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord is in thy mouth.*"

The drought continued, and the horrors of famine caused by the failure of all crops, was felt in Samaria. Ahab was in despair.

The chief officer of Ahab's household was a man named Obadiah. He was a faithful servant of God.

Ahab now took Obadiah, and set out on a desperate search for pasturage and water for the animals, the king going one way and his servant the other.

Before Obadiah had gone very far, Elijah suddenly stood before him. Quickly the prophet told him to go to Ahab and tell him "*Elijah is here.*" Obadiah feared that Elijah would disappear before he could bring the king to him, so he set forth to find Ahab.

Now Ahab had been searching throughout his kingdom for the mysterious stranger who had warned him of the coming drought, three years before; so, as soon as he learned from

Obadiah that the stranger had reappeared, he went to meet him. When he saw the prophet, he asked him, *"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"* Elijah answered that *he* had not troubled Israel, but that Ahab's evil reign had been the cause of the drought.

Then Elijah denounced the idolatry of Ahab, and followed this with a command to assemble his people on Mount Carmel, and bring also all the priests and attendants of Baal and Ashtoroth. Ahab did not dare to disobey, and a great, weary, listless crowd assembled on the sun-burned slopes of the mountain.

Elijah appeared with only one attendant, and soon his voice rang out. *"How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."*

The amazed people stood speechless. Then Elijah proposed a test of powers.

He asked that two bullocks might be provided. The priests of Baal should take one, and prepare it for sacrifice by laying it on the wood upon the altar to their god, but they were

to put no fire under it. The other bullock he would prepare in the same way.

Then the priests of Baal were to call upon their god, and he would call upon his God, and the God that answered by sending fire to consume the sacrifice offered to him, was to be the God of the people. The answer of the people, dejected with long endurance of misery, was ready. They shouted, *"It is well spoken."*

The altar to Baal was prepared, with the sacrifice arranged upon it in proper form. Only fire was lacking. Loudly the priests of Baal prayed. Wildly they leaped around the altar, crying again and again, *"O Baal, hear us."* The morning wore away, and no fire appeared to consume the sacrifice.

The priests of Baal prayed wildly, and wounded themselves in their frenzy, continually calling on Baal to hear them.

As the sun was sinking, Elijah came near the altar which he had built with twelve stones —one for each of the tribes of Israel. The sacrifice, carefully prepared, lay upon the

Elijah cast his well-known mantle upon Elisha, who recognized in the action that from that time he was to be the attendant and friend of the prophet. Bidding his father and mother good-bye, Elisha followed Elijah, thus beginning a long period of service and intercourse with him.

The disappearance of Elijah after his triumph over the priests of Baal, probably caused Ahab and Jezebel to believe that they had seen the last of the prophet. They certainly went on in their wicked ways, for soon we read that Ahab coveted the vineyard of a man named Naboth. This vineyard was quite near the walls of Ahab's palace, and he wished to turn it into a garden.

But Naboth would not sell his vineyard or exchange it for another, because it had belonged to his family for a very long time. His refusal made Ahab so angry and disappointed that he threw himself upon his bed, and refused to eat or even to speak. In this state Jezebel found him, and at once began to comfort him, telling him he should have his vineyard.

The first thing this wicked woman did was to bribe witnesses to say that Naboth had spoken evil of God and also of the king. Naboth was condemned and stoned to death. Ahab then took possession of the vineyard, and as he was walking in it one day, he saw Elijah coming towards him. Tremblingly the wicked king exclaimed, "*Hast thou found me, O my enemy?*" Elijah replied that he had sought him, not because he was his enemy, but to tell him he was to be punished, because all his life he had done wrong.

Ahab was killed in battle three years afterwards, and later, Jezebel met with a terrible death, for she was thrown from a window by her own servants, and crushed to death on the stones below.

When the time came for Elijah's work on earth to cease, he took Elisha with him to a place called Gilgal. They crossed the River Jordan in a manner as wonderful as that of the passage of the Israelites into Canaan, many years before. Elijah struck the waters with

his mantle and they parted, leaving a pathway over which the two walked in safety.

There, while these two men of God were talking together, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared, and parted them. Elijah was swept up into the chariot, and was carried away into heaven. But before he disappeared, his mantle fell from him. Elisha took it up, and with it received the power of performing miracles which God had given to Elijah, the man who did not die.

"I wouldn't have liked to be Ahab," said Dick, "when Elijah found him in poor Naboth's vineyard. He must have felt pretty much ashamed."

"Pooh, he was only frightened," retorted Betty scornfully. "He wasn't one bit sorry for all the bad things he had done. But Jezebel was the worst of all. She talked to Ahab and made him a good deal more wicked than he would have been if he hadn't listened to her.

But God punished her at last." Betty shuddered.

"How silly it was for the people to worship idols. I don't see why they did it," pondered Dick.

"I suppose it was because they could *see* the idols and they couldn't *see* God. They didn't have faith in God like Elijah."

"That was it, I'm sure," nodded Uncle Jim. "Elijah had faith to believe the things he could not see. It is only by having faith and believing that we grow wiser and stronger."

"I think this story was the best yet," praised Dick. "There were so many different people in it and they were all interesting."

"What happened to Elisha, Uncle Jim? Did the ravens feed him, too, and was he carried to heaven in a chariot of fire?"

"I'll answer that question to-morrow," returned Uncle Jim teasingly as he rose from his chair and laid the big red book away. The title of the next story is a queer one, 'When Iron Did Swim.' Think it over."

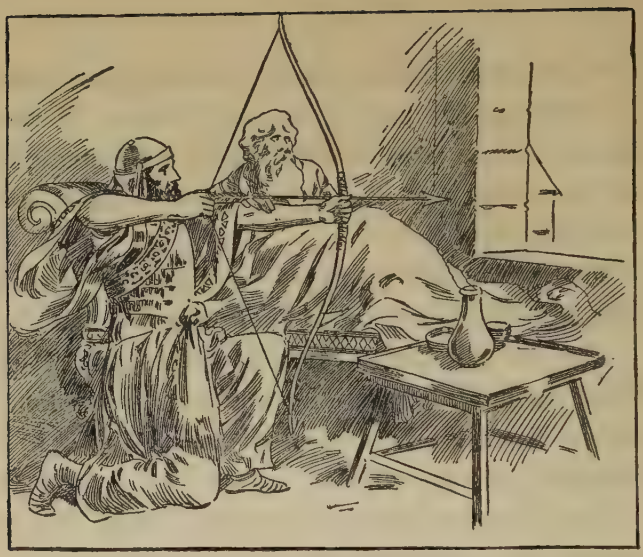
"'When Iron Did Swim.' Did you ever hear of anything funnier. Iron can't swim. If you put a piece of iron in the water it falls straight to the bottom," informed Dick. "It's too heavy to float."

The two children were waiting for Uncle Jim to call them to hear their daily story.

"Maybe this kind of iron was different. Perhaps Elisha did something to it to make it float. Uncle Jim said he'd read about him to-day," reminded Betty.

Just then the children heard, "Dick, Betty, where are you?" in Uncle Jim's hearty voice.

"Coming," they shouted with one accord, and raced through the hall to the living-room. Uncle Jim sat waiting, the big book on his lap. Then he read them, "When Iron Did Swim," the story of the prophet Elisha.



WHEN IRON DID SWIM.

THE STORY OF ELISHA.

IN the time of Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, a man named Elisha lived at a place called Abel-meholah or "meadow of the dance," in the northern part of the valley of the Jordan in Palestine.

Elisha, "the son of Shaphat," as he is called in the Bible, appears to have been a prosperous farmer, for we read that he was ploughing the fields around his home with twelve yoke of oxen

when Elijah passed by, and in doing so cast his mantle upon him.

The custom of casting a garment upon one's successor is of great antiquity, and is to-day considered in Eastern countries as an indispensable part of the consecration of a person to a sacred office.

Notably among the Persians, a master, before his death, selects one of his favorite pupils, and bequeaths to him his robe or mantle. The one receiving the garment is publicly recognized as his successor, and is regarded as having inherited, as well, the virtues and powers of his master.

Evidently the same sentiment prevailed among the Israelites, for when Elijah's mantle descended upon Elisha, the action was understood to convey the spirit and authority of Elijah, and when this became known, Elisha was universally acknowledged as the successor of the great prophet.

After throwing his mantle upon the shoulders of Elisha, Elijah kept on his way to Damascus,

the capital of the kingdom of Syria, but soon Elisha came running after him, calling out, *"Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee."*

Elisha went back to his home, but stayed there no longer than to bid farewell to his parents, and to preside at a parting feast with his people. Then he sought out Elijah, and became his attendant. From that time until the removal of Elijah, nothing is recorded of Elisha.

Elijah's life ended as mysteriously as that of Enoch, who suddenly disappeared without dying. Knowing that his stay on earth was drawing to a close, he tried to make Elisha stay behind while he went to Bethel, but Elisha would not leave him.

Bethel was a city where the people were accustomed to go to ask counsel of God, and there appears to have been there a sort of school for young men.

Once more Elijah attempted to escape Elisha, telling him that God had told him to go to Jericho, but Elisha would not leave him, and so

would not remain at Jericho, and once more the two were on the road. On and on they went until they came to the River Jordan. Then, as though nothing could deter him from setting his foot on the other side, Elijah rolled up his mantle and with it struck the waters. In the presence of fifty of the sons of the prophets, the stream divided right and left, and the two men of God passed over to the other side.

Then there was a whirlwind, and in the bewildering storm Elisha saw his master carried away from him in a flaming chariot drawn by horses of fire, such as no mortal had ever seen. Earnestly he called after him, but no answer came, and never again was Elijah seen.

Elisha rent his clothes after the fashion of Eastern people when mourning, and then, picking up Elijah's mantle which had dropped from him, he went back and stood by the brink of the river.

Elijah had asked him, as they stood together after passing the river, what he should do for him before he was taken away, and Elisha had

replied, "*Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.*" Elijah had then told him that, if he was able to see him when he was taken away, his prayer would be granted, and as Elisha *had* seen his master disappear, he knew that it would be as he had asked. So, exclaiming, "*Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*" he smote the waters with Elijah's mantle. They parted so that he could cross to the other side.

Jericho had been recently rebuilt, and Elisha made his home there. One of the springs from which the city derived its water supply was impure, and the inhabitants of Jericho asked Elisha to remedy this evil. Elisha told them to bring a new cruse, or bottle, with salt in it. They did as he told them, and when Elisha had cast the salt into the spring, the water became pure and wholesome.

After this "healing of the waters," Elisha went to Mount Carmel, a mountain intimately connected with the history of both Elijah and Elisha. It is still one of the most striking features of Palestine, and is called Mar Elyas.

His way led through a country in which the worship of idols was a prominent characteristic, and by the town of Bethel, where one of the golden calves set up by King Jeroboam was still worshipped.

A number of rude and lawless young men were gathered in the outskirts of the town, waiting, as they still wait in the villages of Palestine, for the arrival or passing by of strangers. They called out to Elisha, *"Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head."* Elisha resented the insult to the God whom he served, and cursed them as the fiery Elijah might have done. Immediately two bears came out of the woods, and killed forty-two of the mocking youths.

Some time after this, a woman who was a widow went to Elisha, told him that she was in debt, and that, according to the custom of the land, her creditor was about to sell her two sons as slaves. She had no property whatever except a pot of oil.

Elisha told her to go among her neighbors

and borrow all the empty pots and jars that she could. This the woman did, and after she had made her house secure, her sons brought the vessels to her, and she filled them from her own jar the oil being miraculously increased until every one of the borrowed jars was full. At Elisha's command, she then sold enough of the oil to pay her debt, and still enough remained for the use of her household.

In the city of Shunem a rich woman kept a room in readiness for Elisha whenever he passed that way.

Several years passed, and one day the young son of this woman died of a sunstroke. Placing the child on the bed of the prophet, the woman set off at once to find the man of God.

Elisha saw her coming, and, knowing what her errand was, sent his servant Gehazi to meet her, and talk with her. But the woman persisted in seeing the prophet, and when she reached him at once poured out her tale of sorrow.

Giving his own staff to Gehazi, Elisha told

him to go at once and lay it on the face of the child. Gehazi went at once and did as he was told, but the child still remained as his mother had left him. Gehazi then went back to meet Elisha and the woman, who had followed in haste, and told his master that the child was still without life.

Passing into the chamber where the boy lay dead, Elisha shut the door on the sorrowing mother and the servant, and then prayed to God that the child's life might be restored. His prayer was answered, and the child was given back to his mother, alive and well.

At another time, Elisha, knowing that there was to be a severe famine in the land, warned this woman of Shunem to provide for herself and household during this time. She accordingly went into the country called Philistia, and remained there until the famine had ceased, but upon returning to her own country, she found that her house and lands had been appropriated by another person. She went at once to the King of Israel for redress, and found him talk-

ing with Gehazi the servant of Elisha, who was telling him how his master had restored a dead body to life.

As the woman and her son approached, Gehazi recognized them, and told the king that here was the very woman whose story he had been relating, and the very child who had been restored to life. The woman confirmed what Gehazi had been saying, and at once the king ordered her lands restored to her, and also that she be given the full value of everything the land had produced during her absence.

At another time when food of every kind was very hard to obtain, Elisha was at Gilgal with a number of the sons of the prophets. The large pot in which they were accustomed to prepare soups or stews was put upon the fire, and in it were placed such wild vegetables as could be found. But as soon as they began to eat of this poor food, it was found that some of the vegetables were noxious. Elisha called for meal, and when it was added to the contents of the pot it became wholesome.

Probably about the same time, a man from a neighboring town brought to Elisha the first-fruits of the harvest, which by law were to be given to the priests. There were twenty loaves of barley bread and a quantity of unthreshed grain.

Elisha directed that the people be fed with this food, but his servant, knowing how small the supply was, demurred. Elisha repeated his command, and there was not only plenty of food for all, but some remained uneaten.

Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, a country which had been conquered by King David, but which was not, at this time, under Israelitish rule, had at the head of his army a general who had rendered great services to his country. His name was Naaman, and there is a Jewish tradition that he was the archer who killed Ahab, the wicked king of Israel. In addition to being commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, Naaman was the most prominent officer of the kingdom and a great favorite of the king.

Naaman was afflicted with a disease called

leprosy, which hitherto had defied cure. Among his household was a little Israelitish girl who had been carried away from her own country in one of the numerous Syrian raids upon it. Her duty was to wait upon Naaman's wife, and one day she told her mistress of the fame and deeds of Elisha, the prophet of God, and added that Elisha could heal Naaman of this disease.

In some way, the words of the little girl reached Naaman's ears; and he in turn told the king of Syria what his wife's maid had said. Ben-hadad at once sent Naaman to Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, with a retinue of servants bearing costly presents, and a message to its king, asking that his servant, Naaman, might be healed. He evidently knew little, if anything, of the character and position of Elisha.

At length Naaman arrived at Samaria, and with his chariots and horses stood before the doorway of Elisha's home. The prophet contented himself with sending a messenger to say

that all the Syrian general had to do was to wash seven times in the River Jordan.

Elisha's behavior and the simplicity of his directions made Naaman very angry, and he went away in a rage; but his servants persuaded him to do as the prophet had directed, with the result that he was completely healed. Then with all his retinue he returned to the home of Elisha, and this time he was admitted to his presence. He thanked his benefactor, and asked him to accept the present he had brought, saying, *"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel."*

Elisha refused to accept the present, but his servant Gehazi coveted some of the splendid treasures. After Naaman had departed, he ran after him with a story invented for the occasion, and the generous Syrian gave him more than he asked for, and sent two of his own servants to carry the money and clothing to Elisha's house, where Gehazi hid them. But Elisha was aware of everything that had occurred, and, sending for Gehazi, visited upon him as a pun-

ishment the leprosy of which he had just healed Naaman.

At another time, and presumably at Jericho, the sons of the prophets, with whom Elisha was then living, found their home too small to accommodate them all. They proposed to build a larger house, and asked Elisha to go with them to the River Jordan, where they would cut timbers for this purpose. Elisha consented, and when they reached the stream, they began to cut down the trees upon its bank.

All went well until the head or iron part of the axe which one of the men was using flew off and sank in the muddy waters. His exclamation of dismay—for the axe was a borrowed one—brought Elisha to the scene. After asking to be shown the spot where the iron had disappeared, the prophet cut a stick of wood and threw it into the stream. Immediately the head of the axe appeared, and by Elisha's direction the man took it from the water.

At length there came a time when the kingdoms of Syria and of Israel were again at war.

Several times the king of Syria laid plans to capture the king of Israel, but each time they were foiled by Elisha, to whom they were revealed by God.

At last the king of Syria called his officers to him, and asked which of them was the traitor who told his plans to his enemies. They told him that none of them were traitors, but that, "*Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.*"

Then Ben-hadad told them to find out where Elisha was, and, after a while, they located him at Dothan, a place about half-way between Samaria and Jezreel. Ben-hadad then made a night march and surrounded the place. In the morning Elisha's servant discerned the Syrian host, and returned with the news to his master.

But Elisha was not afraid. He prayed to God, and in consequence the entire Syrian army was stricken with blindness. Then, telling them he would lead them on their way, he conducted them to Samaria, when, in answer to an-

other prayer, their sight was restored, but they found themselves in the presence of the king of Israel and his army. At Elisha's command the king ordered them to be fed, and then sent them back to Syria.

This occurrence so enraged Ben-hadad that he laid siege to Samaria. The siege was a long one, and at last the wretched inhabitants were reduced to the direst straits.

One day the king of Israel was on the wall of the city, and there heard a terrible story from a woman who was telling the horrors of the siege.

Attributing the terrible condition of the city to Elisha, he exclaimed that he would have him killed that day. But nothing came of his angry threat, and soon Elisha told the people that there would be incredible plenty in Samaria, and this was the way it came about.

Four lepers, in desperation, decided to go to the camp of the Syrians upon a chance of saving their lives. When they reached the camp they found it deserted. God had caused the

Syrian host to hear what they supposed to be the sound of an immense army, and, thinking that the king of Israel had hired allies, against whom they could not stand, they fled by night, leaving behind them their tents and all that was in them, their provisions, horses, and other animals.

The lepers went into the tents and helped themselves to food, and then plundered them of whatever they fancied. After a while they decided that they would be punished if they failed to take the news to the city.

So they went back, and told some of the officers that the Syrian army had fled. The officers carried the intelligence to the king, who at first feared that the Syrians were hiding in ambush. However, he sent out spies, who returned with the report that the lepers had told the truth. Then the gates were thrown open, and the famished people streamed out to find food and treasure in the greatest abundance. Elisha's prophecy was fulfilled.

After the siege of Samaria, Elisha went to

Damascus. Ben-hahad, the king, was sick at that time, and wishing to know if he was to recover, sent Hazael, a high official of his court, to Elisha to learn what his fate was to be. Elisha's reply was that Ben-hadad should surely die. Hazael was ambitious, and already saw himself king of Syria, but to make sure of his succession to the throne, he murdered Ben-hadad.

Some time after these events, Jehu, "*the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi,*" became king of Israel. In his early life he had been known as a youth of promise, and later had risen to positions of importance. It was during his reign that Jezebel, the widow of Ahab the wicked, once king of Israel, was thrown from a window of the palace at Jezreel and killed, and that all of the sons of Ahab were slain in fulfilment of the curse pronounced upon the house of that king by the prophet Elisha.

Between this time and his last sickness, there is no record of Elisha's taking any part in the events of the kingdom of Israel. Just pre-

vious to his death, Joash, who was then king of Israel, visited him. At the command of the dying prophet, Joash fitted an arrow to a bow, and shot it through an open window, Elisha's hands meanwhile resting upon the king's hands. This Elisha called the "*arrow of the Lord's deliverance,*" meaning that Joash should smite the Syrians, with whom he was then at war, and destroy them.

By Elisha's direction, Joash then struck the ground with the remaining arrows. He only struck three times, and Elisha rebuked him, saying he should have struck five or six times. As it was, he should only defeat the Syrians three times.

Elisha died, and was buried, but his power as a man of God did not end with his death; for, during a foray of a neighboring nation some time afterwards, a man who had died and was about to be buried, was temporarily placed in the prophet's tomb, and as soon as he touched the bones of Elisha he was restored to life.

"Do you think," said Betty, "that Elijah knew Elisha before that day he saw him working in the field?"

"Why?" asked Uncle Jim.

"Because if he didn't, how did Elisha know that God meant him to stop all his work and follow Elijah forever?"

"Don't you think," said her uncle, "that when God pointed out Elijah to Elisha, He made Elisha see that he was going to become a great prophet, too?"

"Elijah really did give Elisha a double portion of his spirit, for he did even more wonderful things than Elijah had done," observed Dick. "He made Naaman well of leprosy and fed a whole crowd of people with a little bit of bread. And just think of making a big army blind and then making them see again. I'm not surprised that he could make that axe head swim."

"But it was really God who did it all," put in Betty. "Even the double portion of Elijah's spirit wouldn't have done Elisha the least bit

of good if God hadn't been right there to help, would it, Uncle Jim?"

"I don't believe it would," said Uncle Jim soberly, "and I wish you children would try to remember that God is right here to help to-day, just as He was when Elisha was alive. To-morrow I am going to read you a story about a brave woman and a good man. This story is called 'With Hammer and Nail.' Now don't ask me a single question about it, but just wait until to-morrow and you'll find out why the story has such an odd title."

When Betty and Dick went downstairs to breakfast the next morning they found Uncle Jim's place at the table vacant.

"Where is Uncle Jim?" cried Betty in consternation.

"Where's Father?" demanded Dick.

"He won't be here until afternoon," Mrs. Burroughs told them.

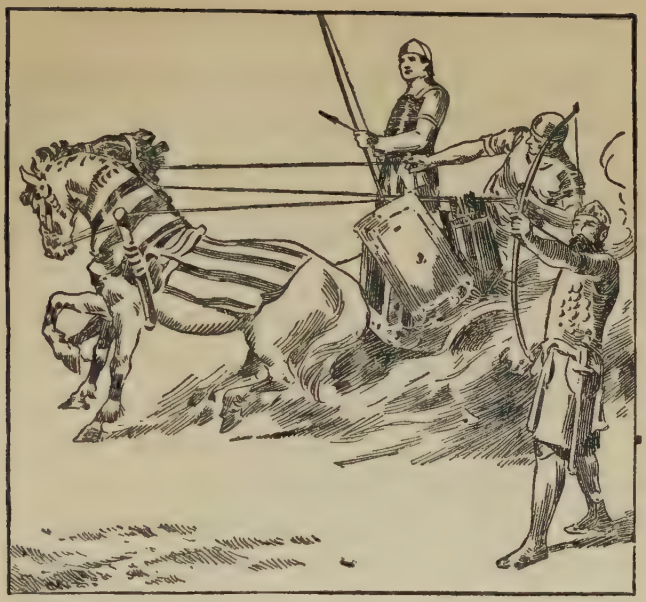
Two eager faces looked their deep dismay.

"Oh, dear, no story for us this morning," deplored Betty.

"Uncle Jim left a message for you," smiled Betty's mother. "He said, 'Tell Dick and Betty that I'll be with them in the living-room at 3 o'clock P. M. sharp.' "

"Then that means we're to have it after all," rejoiced Dick. "I just knew Father wouldn't disappoint us."

Promptly at 3 o'clock Uncle Jim was in his arm chair in the living-room, his audience on either side of him. Then he began the story of "With Hammer and Nail."



WITH HAMMER AND NAIL.

THE STORY OF JAEL AND SISERA.

INSTEAD of treating the native tribes of Canaan as enemies, and driving them out of the land, as God had commanded them to do, the Israelites, after the death of Joshua, their great general, entered into leagues with them and also intermarried with them.

Israel was now governed by judges, who, for

a period of about three hundred years, administered the affairs of the several tribes. They were not appointed until some time after Joshua's death, and during this time *"there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*

At one time the tribes of Judah and Simeon marched against Hebron and took the city. The tribe of Benjamin made war on the Jebusites, and the tribe of Joseph against the Hittites, whose chief city, Bethel, they captured.

The people of the tribe of Dan, living in the mountains west of the River Jordan, coveted Laish, a Sidonian colony in the northern part of Palestine, but before attacking it sent out five spies to ascertain the probabilities of success. These men lodged with a man named Micah, who was an idolater, and had hired a Levite, or member of the tribe of Levi, to act as priest to his gods.

The spies consulted the Levite, and received so favorable a reply that they adopted his religion. Six hundred of the Danites then set

out for Laish and took it with terrible slaughter, and after changing its name to Dan, established themselves there. But the Danites became infected with the idolatry of the inhabitants and soon worshipped images instead of the God of their fathers.

At Shiloh, a form of worship was still kept up by the Israelites. The Tabernacle made by Moses in the wilderness was there, and in it the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and there the high priest officiated with his subordinates. Many of the Israelites went there to offer sacrifices, and a yearly festival was held in honor of the true God.

Some persons set up altars for themselves and kept priests at their own expense. In short, the Israelites failed to do as God had commanded them to do, and in consequence He withdrew his protection from them, and they fell into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia, a country often mentioned in the Bible.

The Israelites paid tribute to the king of Mesopotamia for eight years, and then God

sent them a deliverer in the person of Othniel.

When Joshua divided the land by lot, Caleb claimed the city of Hebron and the surrounding country, and it was given to him. Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak the giant, who lived there, and afterwards offered the hand of his daughter Achsah to the man who would take the city of Debir. Othniel took the city and married Achsah.

Othniel was the first of the military judges of Israel, of which there were fifteen in all. None of these so-called judges were leaders like Moses and Joshua, but they administered justice and kept up a semblance of government.

Othniel judged the Israelites for forty years, which was a prosperous interval, but after his death they again fell into idolatry. Another punishment then came upon them. Eglon, the king of the Moabites, conquered them, and they served him for eighteen years.

The Moabites were descended from Moab, the son of Lot's oldest daughter, who fled with her father from the destruction of Sodom and

A YOUNG GIRL OF BETHLEHEM IN FESTIVAL DRESS

Matt. 25 : 1. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins, which * * went forth to meet the bridegroom." These virgins would very probably be dressed in this way, since it is the common festival dress of many women and girls in Judea. The jacket and vest are beautifully embroidered, often with gold thread. The strings of coins on her forehead are her dowry, which is commonly displayed on the person. The veil is often of silk. The bare foot is not uncommonly seen with the gala clothes.

Gomorrah. The beautiful Ruth, the ancestress of David and of Jesus, was a Moabitess.

The Israelites served the king of Moab for eighteen years, and then a man named Ehud was sent to deliver them. He killed the king of Moab, and then led the Israelitish army against the Moabites and defeated them.

The third judge was Shamgar, who on one occasion slew six hundred of the Philistines with an ox-goad, and after him came Deborah; but between them there was an interval of twenty years, during which time the Israelites were subject to Jabin, king of Canaan.

His capital was Hazor, a fortified city and the principal one of Northern Palestine. He appears to have maintained a standing army, and had nine hundred chariots of iron, which gave him a decided advantage over any tribe with whom he went to war. The captain, or leader, of his army was named Sisera.

Deborah was a woman whose tent was under a palm-tree called by her name, between Ramah and Bethel. Palm-trees were named in Pales-

tine, and this was a well-known landmark. Bethel was the place where Jacob spent the night and dreamed that he saw the angels of God ascending and descending a ladder, and where he made his vow to serve God all the days of his life.

Deborah was more of a prophetess, or one who announces the declarations of God, than a judge, but it was owing to her counsels that the revolt against the wicked ruler, King Jabin, was begun.

Naphtali was the fifth, and Zebulun the tenth son of Jacob. They do not appear to have taken any important part during either the forty years of wandering, or the conquest of Canaan. They received their portion in the distribution of that land, and at this time their leader, or general, was a man named Barak. Deborah summoned him to her, and he appeared under the palm-tree where she gave her decisions. He asked Deborah why she had summoned him and she told him what she wished him to do.

Deborah's instructions were very explicit. She told Barak to take ten thousand of the fighting men of Zebulun and Naphtali and march towards Mount Tabor, one of the most remarkable single mountains in Palestine.

Mount Tabor is now called Jebel-el-Tar, and is about six miles from Nazareth, the home city of Jesus. Deborah also told him that Sisera would be sure to follow him with Jabin's army, and that in the battle that would ensue he would be victorious.

For some reason or other, Barak hesitated. There is no reason to believe that he was not a brave soldier, but he seems to have distrusted Deborah's positive assurance of victory. So he said to her: *"If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go."*

Then Deborah told Barak that she would go with him, but she added that the death of Sisera would be by the hands of a woman. So they set out for Kedesh, and when they arrived there, Barak sent for the ten thousand men from the

two tribes, and led them up to the broad summit of Mount Tabor, where they encamped.

It was not long before Sisera found out that an Israelitish army was encamped on Mount Tabor, with Barak at its head; so, with the terrible nine hundred chariots included in his army, he marched out in that direction.

From where Deborah stood she could see the army of Jabin approaching, led by the renowned Sisera, and when the right moment arrived she called out to Barak: *"Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee?"*

Thus inspired, Barak and his ten thousand men rushed down the mountain side, and in the plain of Esdraelon met Sisera and his army.

But a terrible storm had broken upon the plain. The River Kishon had swollen into a flood, and changed it into a swamp in which the horses and chariots of the Canaanites floundered, while the rain and stinging hail beat in the soldiers' faces and blinded them.

Wild confusion followed Barak's attack. The Canaanites were trodden down by their own horses, the chariots charged the foot soldiers. Stricken with despair, the vast host fled before the Israelites and were slain to the last man. Their general was the only exception, for as soon as Sisera saw that all hope of saving the army was gone, he sprang from his chariot and fled to the tent of Heber the Kenite.

The Kenites were a tribe who had been friendly to the Israelites, accompanying them in their wanderings, but seldom remained in one place for any length of time.

Heber had separated himself from the Kenites and was living near Kedesh.

The defeated Sisera, weary and exhausted, reached this shelter after about three days of wandering. Jael, the wife of Heber, went out to meet him, and took him to her tent.

Tired to the point of exhaustion by his race for life, he lay down at once and Jael covered him with a mantle or blanket. Parched with thirst, he asked for water, and Jael gave him

from the cool skin-bottle a draught of milk. Again she covered him, and in fancied security Sisera fell into a deep sleep as she left the tent.

With eager anxiety, Jael watched at the door of the tent until heavy, regular breathing told her of his unconscious slumber. No one was near. She pulled one of the large tent-pins or nails from its place, found the mallet used for driving them into the ground, and with stealthy step crept into the tent.

Leaning over the sleeping man, she struck the nail right through his temples and hammered it fast into the ground. Hastening from the tent, she saw Barak, who had either been tracking Sisera, or was returning home from his victory, and hurried to meet him.

"Come" said she, *"and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest."* Then she led Barak from the glare of the hot sunshine into the dimly lighted tent where lay his foe.

"So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prevailed

more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan."

Deborah the prophetess celebrated this famous battle and great victory in a wonderful song of praise. It is a poem of the highest patriotism and deep religious feeling, but contains little or nothing of the spirit of Jesus in regard to our enemies. It opens with the words, "*Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel.*" Then it speaks of God's glory as shown in the wilderness, and describes the desolated land—the empty highways and deserted villages. Then she blesses the tribes who had fought for God and country. She reproaches those who failed to help, especially Reuben, who remained among the sheepfolds, and Asher, who would not leave the fishing. Her chief praise is for Zebulun and Naphtali—"*a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death upon the high places of the field.*"

Then she recounts how the skies and rivers fought for them, and utters a blessing over Jael,

because by her own hand she had slain the enemy of Israel and of God. After this she describes Sisera's mother waiting for his return, watching in vain from her lattice window, wondering why her son was so long in coming.

She closes the whole with the hope and prayer: *"So let all thine enemies perish, O Jehovah: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."*

After the defeat of Sisera, the Israelites had a time of rest from their enemies, which lasted for forty years. But the temptations all around them made them forgetful of their duty to God. The blessings gained by Deborah and Barak were abused, and they again worshipped idols. To punish them God allowed the Midianites to oppress them.

These children of the desert would wait until the Israelites had sown their crops, and then when the harvest was ripe would gather it. Their hosts of camels and horses would cover the pasture lands; they drove off the cattle, and made the land desolate.

They drove the Israelites into caves, and seized many for slaves, until, at last, the repentant people turned once more to God.

At Ophrah there lived a chief called Joash, who had a son named Gideon, or "the hewer." One day while he was at work, an angel of God appeared, and said: *"The Lord is with thee."* Gideon replied: *"Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?"* The angel told him to deliver Israel from the Midianites, promising that God would be with him.

Then Gideon asked the angel that a sign might be given him whereby he would know that he was talking with God, and further asked that he would not depart until he had given him a present. So Gideon made ready a kid and unleavened cakes of meal, and brought them to the angel where he sat under a tree.

Then the angel told Gideon to lay the meat and the cakes upon a rock and pour the broth over them. When this was done, the angel touched the gift with his staff and fire arose from the rock and consumed them.

After the angel had gone, and Gideon had built an altar to God, the divine command came to destroy the altars of Baal, the god of the Midianites. So Gideon took ten of his servants and offered a bullock upon the altar he had just reared, using the wood of the pillar for fuel.

When the men of Ophrah found out what Gideon had done, they demanded that Joash should give them his son that they might kill him. But Joash told them that if Baal were really a god he ought to be able to take care of himself.

From this time Gideon's enemies were active. Gideon's own tribe of Manasseh answered his summons by trumpet, and his messengers brought other tribes to his encampment on Mount Gilboa, whence they could see the plain below dotted with the tent of their enemies.

Once more Gideon asked for a sign that God would save Israel by his hand, and one was given him. He laid a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor; and in the night while all

around was dry, the fleece was so wet with dew that in the morning he was able to wring a bowlful of water from it. The next night, in answer to Gideon's prayer, the dew was all around it but the fleece was found dry in the morning.

Gideon had thirty-two thousand men with him, and he now led them to a well called Harod, where they encamped. But God now told Gideon that his army was too large; with so large a force the Israelites might think that they gained the victory by force of arms.

So, at His command Gideon sent away twenty-two thousand men who were faint-hearted. Then God said: *"The people are yet too many."*

Still following the divine instructions, the remaining ten thousand were told to drink from the well or spring. Three hundred drank of the water out of their hands, the rest put their faces into the water and drank in that way. Then God told Gideon that He would save Israel by the three hundred that drank out of

their hands, and Gideon sent the remainder away.

Gideon then gathered his three hundred men, and told each of them to take a trumpet or ram's horn, and torch smouldering in an empty earthen pitcher. Then he divided them into three companies of one hundred men each.

In the dead of night they surrounded the camp of the Midianites on three sides. Then they blew upon the trumpets and broke the pitchers, and with the flaming torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands, they raised a great shout, calling out: *"The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon."*

Not knowing by whom, or how, they were attacked, the Midianites were seized with a panic. The Israelites, without weapons, stood motionless, and the enemy fled and fell upon each other, so that *"the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow."* Before morning the whole army was scattered, pursued by the faint-hearted ones whom Gideon had sent away, but

who now slew the fugitives as they and their camels straggled through the land of Ephraim.

There was a second battle at one of the fords of the Jordan, by which the Midianites hoped to escape, and there two princes of Midian were slain. In spite of Gideon's efforts to overtake the foe, two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, were able to cross the river, closely pursued by Gideon and his hundred men.

Weary and hungry, Gideon and his band arrived at Succoth and asked for food, saying that they were pursuing the two kings. But the princes of Succoth were surly and selfish, and refused to give them food, so Gideon told them after he had overtaken and captured the kings he would come back and punish them.

At Penuel, the place where Jacob wrestled with the angel, the people, through fear or mistrust, refused to feed the band, and Gideon told them that when he returned he would destroy the town.

At Karkor Gideon found the last of the mighty army of the Midianites, encamped

among the hills. They fled again, but he pursued them, seized the two kings and destroyed their army, gaining the third and last victory.

Then, with his two royal captives, he returned to Succoth, and after showing the two kings to the people, took seventy-seven of their principal men, and had them beaten with briers or thorny plants of the desert. At Penuel he broke down the tower which was the pride and strength of the place and slew some of the responsible men of the city.

After this, Gideon settled the fate of the two kings. After some questioning he commanded his son Jether to slay them, but the youth was afraid and did not draw his sword. Then the kings said with great dignity, "*Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength,*" and Gideon slew them both.

In their gratitude, the Israelites now wanted to make Gideon their king, promising that the rule should continue to his son's son, but Gideon would not accept the offer.

Peace and prosperity once more began to

reign, and Gideon, "the hewer," died at Ophrah, where God had first called him to be a deliverer of Israel, and where he had raised the Altar to His name.

"If it hadn't been for Deborah the children of Israel would never have dared to fight to be free. They would have gone on letting King Jabin make slaves of them," said Betty when the story was finished. "That shows that women can be as brave as men if they want to. Even little girls can be brave, only I don't believe I could have been as brave as Deborah."

"She was different," reminded Dick. "She was a prophetess. God helped her the same way He did Elijah and Elisha. But I like Gideon better than I do her. He was brave, too, and he did just what God told him to do without saying, 'Why must I do it?' or 'I don't want to do it that way.'"

"Yes, that's so," agreed Betty. "My but those trumpets must have made a lot of noise.

I'd have been scared if I'd been a Midianite."

"I suppose I would have, too," said Dick slowly. "I hope the children of Israel were good after that. They ought to have been pretty grateful to Gideon."

"They were," declared Betty. "They asked him to be king, but he wouldn't. He knew that God would rather have him take care of his sheep and be just plain Gideon."

"Yes," broke in Uncle Jim, "Gideon knew that if God had intended him to be king He would have sent His angels to tell Gideon. It was better for Gideon to go on living as he had lived before God called him to do his work. To-morrow I am going to read you one of the two most wonderful stories ever written. I won't tell you the title though, until I am ready to read it to you. We'll have it for a surprise."

"To-day's our story surprise! To-day's our story surprise!" sang Betty the next morning

as she ran into the living room with Dick at her heels. "Uncle Jim's going to tell us one of the two most wonderful stories ever written, Mother," called Betty to Mrs. Burroughs, who had paused in the doorway for a moment on her way to the kitchen. "You'd better stay and listen to it, too."

"I believe I will." Mrs. Burroughs smiled fondly at her brother and seated herself in a rocking chair near the cheerful open fireplace. Betty brought a little stool and placed it so that she might sit and lean against her mother, while Dick took his usual place at his father's left.

"Before I begin," stated Uncle Jim, picking up the red book, "I would like to say that the title of this story is 'The First Christmas.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Betty softly. "I——"

Then she checked herself, smiled brightly, and settled down to listen to the wonder story.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

IT is not a long story, this story of the first Christmas, and there are some things about it that are hard to understand, but the more we read and study the beautiful life of Jesus which began on that day, the better we can understand why He was born as the humblest child is born, and the easier it will be for us to grow like Him, and live and think and pray as He did.

On the night before the first Christmas Day, a little company of shepherds were in the grassy fields below the village, or town of Bethlehem, watching their flocks and guarding them from the attacks of prowling animals. A great, strange star hung over the sleeping village perched upon the hills above them, and the yellow gleam of a lantern swinging before its entrance told where the khan, or inn, was to be found.

The flocks so carefully tended were something more than common sheep. They were the flower of many flocks, chosen with great care and set apart for the sacrifices in the great Temple at Jerusalem, only six miles away.

It is not unlikely that, as the guardians of the sacred flocks gazed over the very fields and hills where David the Shepherd boy had watched his father's flocks and protected them from wild beasts, ere he became the mighty King of Israel, they remembered the promise made by God to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and to David himself, that a descendant of this warrior king

should be the Messiah who would restore Israel to its place among the nations of the earth.

Prophets and priests had proclaimed this promise to the Jews, as the children of Israel were then called, but prophets and priests and people believed that the promised Saviour would come as a King, and again make of them a great nation. To them it was beyond belief that the "King of the Jews," as they loved to speak of Him, could be born in a little village like Bethlehem, grow up among them, and quietly and gently teach that God is Love. He must come in splendor, this King of theirs, and with a host of followers; and according to the legends told by the rabbis, or teachers, the successors of Israel were then to be exterminated, the holy mountains, Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel be brought together, and Jerusalem, the holy city, rebuilt with a magnificence beyond the power of man to conceive, be set upon them.

As the flocks moved about slowly in the starlight or sleepily crouched in groups upon the grass, suddenly a dazzling light appeared, and,

wrapped in its radiance one of God's angels stood by the astonished shepherds. From the very gates of heaven this flood of glory seemed to stream, and as the startled shepherds stood without the power of speech, the stillness of the night was broken by the voice of the angel, and this is what he said:

"Fear not, for, behold I bring you Good Tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger."

Then from beyond the stars a flood of heavenly melody swept down, and a multitude of other angels were revealed, while the air was filled with their music as they sang:

"Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

But only for a moment, for, as suddenly as it had appeared, the splendid vision faded, the melody died away, and the shepherds were again

alone with their flocks in the silent starlight. There is no record in the Bible that any one else beheld this heavenly manifestation or heard the angels' ringing song.

When the last notes had died away the shepherds began to talk of these wonderful events, and to say to each other:

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

Their first idea, now that their bewilderment was over, was to go and see the wondrous sight of which the angels had told them. They were so full of eager hope that they could not wait until morning. So, leaving their sheep unprotected in the fields, they made their way as quickly as they could towards Bethlehem.

Knowing that strangers would be found at the village inn, we may believe that they went straight to the place, guided by the lantern swinging before its entrance, and that, pressing across the crowded court-yard to the stable, as they had been directed, they found a Baby lying

in a manger. Then they knew that they beheld the long-expected Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

At this time all the world was under Roman rule, and the hand of the emperor, Cæsar Augustus, rested heavily upon the Jews. He had ordered a census to be taken, and this was to be followed by taxation. All males must register at the town to which their family originally belonged; women were not obliged to report personally, but must furnish a statement of what property they owned.

At Nazareth lived Joseph, the village carpenter, and as both he and his wife, Mary, were descendants of David, they were compelled to take a weary and distasteful journey to Bethlehem, there to enroll their names as members of the house of the great king.

Although of royal lineage, Joseph was a poor man. It was not uncommon at that time for a lineal representative of a royal line to earn his living as a mechanic or a laborer. We are told that Hillel, the great Rabbi, though he, as well

as Joseph, was a descendant of David, spent a great part of his life in the deepest poverty as a common workman.

Mary, the wife of Joseph, accompanied him on the toilsome journey. Slowly the weary miles were covered, Joseph probably on foot and Mary riding on a donkey such as are used as beasts of burden in the East to-day. Not many miles from Bethlehem they skirted the hill now called "Little Paradise Mountain," upon which stood the palace-fortress of "Herod the Great," ruler of Judea. Then, toiling up the steep hillside they entered the village of Bethlehem and halted before the village inn.

This inn was very unlike our ideas of what an inn should be. We expect a house where comfort of all kinds can be had in addition to food and lodgings. Instead, the weary travelers found a low building built of rough stone around three sides of a court-yard. Its rooms faced this open space and were hardly more than porches with a roof and three walls. Sometimes the side of a hill forms the fourth

side of the square of eastern inns, and in such cases rooms or grottoes are dug out of the soft limestone rock and used as stables or feeding places for cattle.

It is probable that Joseph and Mary were obliged to lodge in one of those grottoes, for all the rooms in the main building were filled with strangers, who, like themselves, had traveled to Bethlehem for the enrollment; and there the baby Jesus, the Redeemer, was born.

It was in this humble lodging that the shepherds of Bethlehem bowed low before the infant Jesus, whom they found lying in a manager as the angel had said, with His father and mother watching beside Him. They gazed in wonder upon the sleeping child, and then told Joseph and Mary about the angels they had seen, and of their glorious message. But they could not keep the news to themselves, and as they passed through the silent village streets on their way back to their flocks they shouted joyfully: "The Christ has come! The Christ has come!"

And everywhere they went they told the

story; told about the Child and all that the angel had told them about Him. And many heard them and went also to the stable to see the Baby, and they, in turn, talked freely about the events of this first Christmas Day. The Bible records no words of Mary at this time; it only says:

"Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."

Whatever others believed about the coming of the Messiah, Mary knew that her Baby was indeed the Christ, and that they were to call Him Jesus.

Eight days later, His name of Jesus was given to the Baby with all regard to the Jewish ceremonial law, and this name is really a glorious title, for it means "The Help," or "Saviour." When He was a month old, His mother carried Him in her arms to the Temple at Jerusalem. Then Joseph placed the Baby in the arms of a white-robed priest, who blessed the Child and then gave him back again.

Two aged people were in the Temple at that

time, a man named Simeon and a woman whose name was Anna. They recognized the Baby as the long-promised Saviour, and each blessed Him, speaking kind words to the young mother and the baby Jesus. Then the "Holy Family," as Joseph and Mary and Jesus are often called, went back to Bethlehem, where they were to live for a while.

Herod, the detested tyrant who ruled Judea, was at this time in a pitiable old age. Maddened by the crimes of his past years, he was now given great cause for alarm and anxiety by the visit to Jerusalem of some Eastern Magi, or "wise men" as they are called in the Bible. These strangers had the appearance of men of distinction and wealth and went about the city asking:

"Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East and are come to worship Him."

But for all his uneasy conscience, Herod was as crafty as he was cruel. At once he called together the priests and other learned men of

Jerusalem, and questioned them closely as to the place where, according to prophecy, the Messiah of the nation was to be born. They answered him readily, "In Bethlehem of Judea." Then the cunning old man told the strangers to go to Bethlehem, and if they succeeded in finding the Child to come back and tell him so that he might go and worship Him, so the travelers set out for Bethlehem.

"And, lo, the star which they found in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was."

The humble home at Bethlehem was soon found, and there the Magi bowed before the Child and presented their offerings of gold and precious spices. Their visit ended, they did not return to Jerusalem, but, warned by a dream as they had been led by a star, they went to their homes by another way, and thus the crafty king's plan was baffled. Neither Scripture nor authentic history give us any further knowledge of their existence.

Different writers vary as to the number of

the visiting Magi, and it is by no means certain from what country they came, but it is quite probable that their home was in Persia. The common belief is that they were three in number, and one writer tells us that their names were Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar, and further informs us that Melchior was a descendant of Shem, and an old man with white hair and a long beard. Caspar is described as a ruddy and beardless youth and a descendant of Ham; while Balthasar, swarthy and in the prime of life, was of the lineage of Japhet.

Herod, baffled for a time, was determined to secure the destruction of the Child who might prove to be a rival, and by his orders all male children in Bethlehem were murdered by his soldiers. But again Joseph, warned in a dream of the coming danger, took Jesus and His mother and fled by night into Egypt.

For about a year they lived in that wonderful land of crowded cities and scattered villages, that country which the great river Nile made the greatest corn country in the world. Joseph

probably found plenty of work to do, perhaps building houses, or making carts and ploughs, or other rude farm implements. In this land of brilliant sunshine, glittering floods, and golden harvests, Jesus learned to talk and walk, while Mary attended to the simple duties of the house.

Then Joseph dreamed again, and this time that Herod was dead, and that they might return to Palestine. Soon they were on the way, but after a while another dream warned Joseph to go into Galilee; so they passed by Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and took the path that led them over the hills of Samaria, over the rich plain of Esdraelon, and then up a winding valley to their own village at the top. There, at Nazareth, Jesus passed all but three or four years of His life on earth. Of His childhood there the Bible says:

"The Child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him."

Poets, historians and painters have reveled

in the imaginary glories of the first Christmas Day, and at times it is hard to fancy the most stupendous event in the history of the world occurring without some disturbance of natural laws. Early Christian writers allowed their imagination to run riot in spreading a blaze of miracle over the early years of Jesus, while tradition and the spurious gospels of the earlier centuries have furnished a mass of legendary information which does not bear the stamp of simplicity and truth that appears on every page of the Gospels.

In these writings we are told that the shepherds at Bethlehem were four in number, that their names were Misael, Acheel, Cyriachs, and Stephanas, and that the little village of Beit-Sahur was their native place. In speaking of the hour of Jesus' birth, Joseph is made to say:

"I looked up into the air, and I saw the clouds astonished, and the fowls of the air stopping in their flight. And I looked down towards the earth, and saw a table spread, and working

people sitting around it, but their hands were upon the table, and they did not move to eat. They who had meat in their mouths did not eat. They who lifted their hands up to their heads did not draw them back; and they who lifted them up to their mouths did not put anything in; but all their faces were fixed upwards. And I beheld the sheep dispersed, and yet the sheep stood still. And the shepherd lifted up his hand to smite them, and his hand continued up. And I looked unto a river, and saw the kids with their mouths close to the water, and touching it, but they did not drink."

Another writer says, "Jesus spake even when He was in the cradle, and said to His mother: Mary, I am Jesus the Son of God;" and again that Mary gave to the Magi one of Jesus' first garments, and that they regarded it as one of their greatest treasures.

Apocryphal legends tell us that, on the way to Egypt to avoid the wrath of Herod, the dragons came and bowed to Jesus, and the lions and leopards adored Him. Wherever His footsteps

trod roses blossomed, and at His command palm-trees bent down to furnish dates to the Holy Family. All the idols of the land of Egypt fell shattered upon their faces upon His entrance into that country. Mataréëh, a few miles northeast from Cairo, is given as the home of Jesus and Mary and Joseph while in Egypt, and for many years a fountain was shown, whose waters Jesus had made fresh.

Some of the legends of His boyhood are that He carried spilt water in His robe, pulled to its proper length a board which Joseph had sawed short, moulded sparrows of clay, and then made they fly by clapping His hands.

All these accounts of childish omnipotence are meant to honor Jesus, but no invention can honor Him. The Boy Jesus of the Gospels is simple, humble, obedient; and on minor incidents of His boyhood they do not dwell. The fullest historian of His boyhood is St. Luke, and it is not difficult to imagine that he received such fragments as he has recorded from the lips of Mary herself.

There is no day in the year, except possibly its own birthday, that brings more pleasure to a child than Christmas Day. All children look forward to it with great delight and anticipation, having learned to associated the day with gifts and remembrances.

But Christmas Day is the birthday of the best man that ever lived—Jesus the Christ—who came into the world as a little baby on the twenty-fifth day of December, more than nineteen hundred years ago.

"We've both heard that story in Sunday School, haven't we?" asked Dick, nodding to Betty. "But I don't believe we ever thought much about how wonderful it was. Last year we had a Christmas tree in our church with loads of candles, all lighted, and lots of presents. We sang Christmas carols, too, 'Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem,' and 'Carol, Sweetly Carol,' and some others, but I thought more about the tree than I did about that dear little

baby in the stable with the cows and horses."

"I've always thought more about trees and presents and hanging up my stocking," confessed Betty, flushing, "but now I begin to see that they're just a little part of the real Christmas. We ought to be good and glad and happy on Christmas Day because it's the birthday of Jesus who gave Himself for us. He was a Christmas present to the whole world, wasn't He? I suppose that is why we remember His birthday by giving presents to the people we care about."

"Yes, darling," Mrs. Burroughs smiled tenderly at her little daughter, "that is the reason we should all be loving and giving at Christmas time. Christmas spirit means 'Christ' spirit, and we know that our Saviour was loving and kind to every one."

"I'm going to like next Christmas better than any I've ever had because I'll keep thinking of father's story about the very first Christmas of all. When I sing the carols I'll under-

stand what the words mean and I'll feel like singing because Jesus was born in Bethlehem," finished Dick, his brown eyes shining.

Just then there was a loud ring of the door bell. Mrs. Burroughs hurried into the hall with an anxious face. Uncle Jim followed in time to see her signing a messenger boy's book. The two children were close behind him.

"It's a telegram," she said as she tore open the envelope. The next instant she began to smile. Then she caught Betty in her arms. "Father will be with us to-morrow, dear," she cried joyously.

"Then my vacation is over, and I must go," said Uncle Jim, "for I promised to meet him."

There were immediate hurried communications with the shipping offices to find out all the news obtainable about Captain Burroughs' ship; there were the busy preparations for departure; but two woe-filled faces at last were noticed by the grown-up people.

"How about our stories?" asked Betty.

"Yes," added Dick.

"I'm afraid we must postpone them until the next visit," said Uncle Jim.

"Couldn't you read us one more," asked Betty, "just one?"

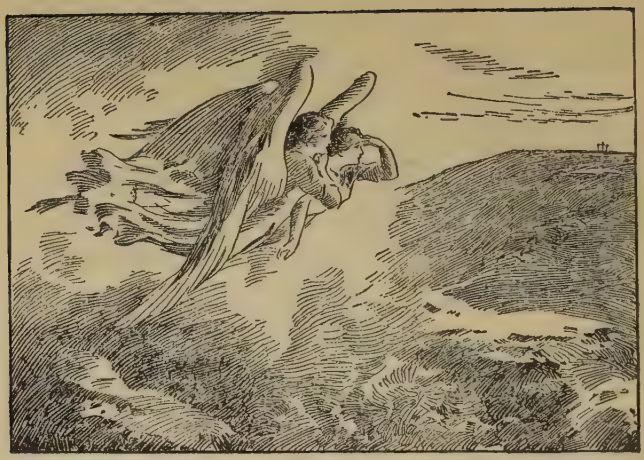
"Don't you think you could find time, Jim?" asked Mrs. Burroughs.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Uncle Jim, as he looked up from his packing. "I believe you're as anxious as the children about these stories. But I'll tell you what," he said, "if you youngsters will give me a promise, both of you, to go to Sunday School next Sunday without a word of grumbling, I'll read you to-night all about the first Easter."

Betty and Dick exchanged glances. Betty was about to speak when Dick put his finger to his lips to insure silence.

"We'll go to Sunday School, both of us," guaranteed Betty.

That night Dick and Betty were allowed to stay up half an hour longer than their usual bed-time to hear Uncle Jim's story of "The First Easter."



THE FIRST EASTER

IN the story of The First Easter, as in the story of The First Christmas, there is much that is hard to understand, but if we review somewhat the Blessed Life of Jesus, we shall better appreciate the glorious significance of the day.

Jesus had passed through His human life, everywhere uttering words of pity, and stretch-

ing out hands of mercy. To suffer was to have a claim upon Him. He had not used His supernatural powers for His own benefit, but for the good of others. He employed them freely, helping, comforting, healing, blessing, wherever He went.

Shepherds, led by angels, were the first witnesses of Jesus' birth. His boyhood was spent at Nazareth, and was entirely without sin. He studied the Old Testament Scriptures in the synagogues, but in no way did He become identified with the Pharisees or their instructions, yet when He began His ministry He was able to teach with authority.

Jesus was baptized by John, who was only six months older than himself, and then, after successfully resisting the temptations of an evil spirit, He began to exercise His higher powers and gifts, thus entering upon His public activity.

The life of Jesus was a wandering one during His short ministry on earth. He visited Jerusalem twice, Samaria once, Nazareth once,

and Capernaum several times, besides pausing on the banks of the Jordan, and traveling from place to place in Galilee. He said of Himself, that He had not *"where to lay His head."*

It is thought that Jesus wore the usual dress of a rabbi, or teacher; a blue robe worn over a long undergarment of white, or pale gray striped with crimson; a covering of folded linen to protect His head, and sandals for His feet.

Many beautiful incidents in the life of Jesus occurred between the time of the first manifestation of His miraculous powers at Cana, where He turned water into wine at a wedding feast, and the calling of the Twelve Apostles.

On one of His visits to Capernaum Jesus was surrounded by sick and helpless people, and He healed them all; made them well and strong and happy. With heavy burdens lifted, and sorrowful hearts cheered, the little town slept; but Jesus set out before daylight, and, reaching a solitary place on a mountain, prayed to His Father, God.

Then from village to village, Jesus carried

His message and ministry of Love. One day a poor leper came to Him. Jesus touched him, and he was a leper no more.

Not long after this—again at Capernaum, four men carried a paralyzed cripple on a litter to the house where Jesus was teaching. The crowd about the door was so great that they could not enter, so they lifted their burden onto the flat roof of the house, and having made an opening, lowered the sick man, still on his litter, into the room where Jesus was.

"*Son, thy sins be forgiven thee,*" said Jesus, "*I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.*" Instantly cured the man departed, carrying his litter as he had been commanded.

The following Sabbath day Jesus publicly healed a man in the synagogue, whose hand was withered and powerless. The unbelieving rabbis, and others who were present, were so angry at Him for doing this, that in their hatred and malice they consulted with the supporters of the Roman government, whom they usually re-

garded as enemies, as to the surest way of bringing about His death.

Then came the calling of the men whom Jesus named the Apostles. They were twelve in number, and became associated in new and peculiar relations to Him. It was the first step towards spreading His blessed teachings.

In the little village of Bethany was a humble home which Jesus often visited. The family consisted of a man named Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus was taken sick and died. Jesus was greatly affected by his death, for he dearly loved him. Lazarus had been in the tomb for three days before Jesus appeared at the home of the sisters, but he at once went to the tomb of his friend, and called out to him to *"come forth,"* and the man who had been dead for three days arose sound and well.

After the raising of Lazarus from the dead, many of the leading rabbis of Jerusalem, dreading the growing influence of Jesus over the people, and perhaps persuading themselves that it might lead to a revolt against the Roman gov-

ernment, brought all their power against Him.

A council was hurriedly called; the acting high-priest that year presided, and it was formally decided to put Jesus to death. The only point to be considered was the easiest way of accomplishing their purpose. Jesus knew the malice in their hearts, and went away to a lonely village called Ephraim. Here He remained until He made his last journey to Jerusalem.

While on this journey, certain mothers brought their little ones to Jesus, in the hope that He might touch them, and were rebuked by the Apostles for doing so. When Jesus heard the rebuke, He lifted the little ones tenderly in His arms, and fondly blessed them, saying, "*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*"

As Jesus pursued His way to Jerusalem, the roads were thronged with people going there to keep the Passover, and among the crowds were many beggars. The way led by Jericho, and

close by the entrance to the city sat one of those beggars, a blind man named Bartimeus.

Hearing some one in the crowd say that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, Bartimeus called loudly for help. In vain the people bade him be silent; he only repeated his cries more loudly. Jesus listened, stopped, called the man to him, and asked, *"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"* The blind man answered eagerly, *"Lord, that I might receive my sight,"* and immediately he received it.

On the afternoon of Friday, the eighth day of the Hebrew month Nisan, Jesus once more reached the friendly home at Bethany, and there, where His welcome was always sure, He spent His last Sabbath upon earth.

In the evening, He and His Apostles attended a feast at the house of a friend of Martha and Mary, a man named Simon who had once been a leper, and was not unlikely indebted to Jesus for his cure. Lazarus, who had been dead but was now alive again, was also present.

During the meal, Mary anointed Jesus' feet

with a perfume of the costliest kind. Some of the Apostles, led by Judas Iscariot, objected to this on the ground that it was wasteful; but Jesus reproved them, declaring that wherever the Gospel should be preached throughout the world, Mary's act of devotion should *"be spoken of for a memorial of her."*

The news of Jesus' arrival at Bethany soon reached Jerusalem, and caused His enemies to plan for the destruction of Lazarus, also, because his restoration to life had made such an impression on the people.

On the next day—the Jewish Monday, which we commemorate as "Palm Sunday"—Jesus entered Jerusalem. It was the custom for pilgrims to enter that city for the Passover in orderly processions, with music, and carrying banners. As there was no longer any need to restrain the ardor of the people Jesus prepared to conform to the custom.

Following His instructions two of His disciples found at Bethpage, a village close by, a young animal which had never carried or drawn

a burden. From very early times such animals had been chosen for sacred purposes. It was on this colt, with the mantles of the disciples thrown over it, that Jesus rode attended by a great multitude, who spread their garments and branches plucked from trees in the way.

Between the vineyards, orchards, and olive gardens that bordered the road, the procession wound slowly along, welcomed by glad throngs that had poured out of Jerusalem to meet it, shouting, "*Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!*" Crossing the bridge over "the brook Kidron," Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Pilgrims were not allowed to go beyond the foot of Mount Moriah without purification, according to the Jewish ceremonial law. At this place the crowd dispersed, and Jesus, first removing His sandals, entered the Temple alone. As the day was drawing to a close, He staid there but a short time, and then returned to Bethany.

But the next morning, Jesus was back in

Jerusalem, and once more he expelled the merchants and money-changers from the Temple courts. Then the blind, and lame, and all who needed bodily relief surrounded Him, and He healed them willingly. The angry priests and rabbis would have seized Him if they had not feared the excited crowd.

The opportunity for which the enemies of Jesus were watching so eagerly came at last. One of His own trusted disciples went to the chief priests, asking what they would give him to betray his Master. His name was Judas Iscariot, or Judas of Kerioth.

The priests received Judas gladly, and agreed to pay him the price of a full-grown slave—thirty silver pieces, a sum equal to about twenty dollars of our money. He promised to find them an opportunity of arresting Jesus quietly.

Acting upon instructions from Jesus, Peter and John, two of the Apostles, secured a room in Jerusalem, and prepared for a celebration of the Passover. There Jesus and His twelve Apostles met for "The Last Supper."

During the meal Jesus taught His disciples a touching lesson in humility; laying aside His upper robe, He washed and wiped their feet. Then He told them that one of their number was to betray Him, saying to Judas, *"That thou doest, do quickly."* Judas rose and went away hastily, but none but Jesus knew his errand.

Jesus then instituted the Holy Communion, which we observe in our churches, and then conversed with His beloved "Eleven," cheering their sinking spirits by promises of unspeakable sweetness. When the hour of parting came, a hymn was sung, and the little company broke up for the last time.

Through the city gate, across the Kidron bridge, into the olive garden called Gethsemane, they went, leaving eight of the disciples near the entrance. Jesus and the remaining three entered the quiet shadows of the olive trees, to pray. Worn and weary, the three fell asleep. Three times Jesus awakened them, the last time saying, *"Rise up, let us go! lo! he that betrayeth Me is at hand."*

As He spoke, torches flamed over the quiet garden, and the forms of armed men showed indistinctly in their light. Their guide was Judas of Kerioth. Stepping to the side of Jesus, he kissed Him, and said, *"Hail, Master!"* the agreed way of designating Jesus to the soldiery.

Not many words were spoken. Jesus surrendered at once, only stipulating that no harm should come to His Apostles, who, beside themselves with fear, forsook Him and fled.

Bound, and a prisoner, Jesus was led back into the city, and to the palace probably occupied by Caiaphas, the high-priest and Annas his father-in-law and president of the Sanhedrim, or great Jewish council.

First, He was taken to Annas, and from him to Caiaphas, but not before He had been subjected to much insulting treatment. False witnesses had been summoned, only to have their evidence fall to the ground, and the only hope that Caiaphas had was to secure from Jesus Himself some admission that could be construed into blasphemy.

In reply to the high-priest's question, Jesus replied that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Turning to the council, Caiaphas exclaimed, "*Ye have heard the blasphemy! What think ye?*" and the reply was, "*He is guilty of death.*"

Although thus condemned by the Sanhedrim, the sentence could not be carried out unless confirmed by Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator of Judea, who was on his way to Jerusalem, a part of his duties being to maintain order there during great festivals. Before Pilate could be seen, Jesus was left to the brutal violence of the Roman soldiers.

Once before Pilate, who was unwillingly obliged to investigate the matter, Jesus was charged with "*stirring up the people,*" and with calling Himself the "*King of the Jews.*" Pilate was infirm of purpose, as well as unprincipled. Convinced that Jesus was the victim of ill will and jealousy, he told the priests and rabbis that He was innocent. Then he caught at a chance of escaping responsibility.

The prisoner was called Jesus of Nazareth; Nazareth was in Galilee; and Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, was at that moment in Jerusalem. The two rulers were not on good terms, so Pilate sent Jesus to Herod.

Herod questioned Jesus, but received no answer. Angered at his silence, Herod first mocked Him, and then sent Him back to Pilate, dressed in a gorgeous robe. Pilate then resorted to a stratagem. Every Passover a prisoner was set free, and Pilate bade the crowd choose between Jesus and Barabbas, a robber who had committed murder and was then lying in prison, feeling sure that they would choose Jesus.

To the dismay of Pilate, the crowd shouted their decision, "*Away with this Man! And release unto us Barabbas.*" In angry helplessness, Pilate called for water, and publicly washed his hands, crying out, "*I am innocent of the blood of this just person! See ye to it.*" Instantly the frenzied people yelled in reply, "*His blood be on us and on our children!*"

Pilate then asked what he should do to Jesus,

and as one great voice the answer came, *"Crucify Him!"* The cowardly Pilate had one last hope. Possibly the cruel multitude might be touched if they saw Jesus punished by the scourge—a whip into which pieces of lead and bone had been plaited.

Jesus bore the agony meekly. Then over His bruised and bleeding body a cast-off cloak was flung; a rude crown of sharp thorns was placed upon His head; and in His right hand a reed, as a mock scepter, was placed; while in heartless derision the mob sneeringly hailed Him as King of the Jews. With unwearying patience Jesus submitted to their taunts and jeers.

Now exposed where all could see Him, the chief priests led, and the crowd again took up the cry, *"Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"* Cowed by the words, *"If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend;"* feeling that he could not spare one accused of treason against the Roman emperor, Pilate yielded to the voice of the people. Hastily Jesus was stripped of his robes, and hurried towards the city gate, while

with Him, also under guard, went two criminals who were to be crucified at the same time and place.

Sinking under the burden of the cross upon which He was to be nailed, Jesus fell to the ground before reaching the place of execution. The soldiers of the guard transferred the cross to a man whom they met just then, and Jesus stumbled on to die. Behind Him walked sobbing women, whose tears were all the sympathy He had.

The hill was climbed; a few rapid preparations made; and Jesus was crucified like a common criminal. At the moment when the spirit left His body, an earthquake shook the earth, chasms opened in the rocks, and tombs were thrown open by the convulsion. The Veil-of-Partition in the Temple was rent from top to bottom.

Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission to remove the body of Jesus from the cross. He was a rich man, and the owner of a garden near by, in which a tomb had been hewn from a rock.

Reverently the body was lowered, bathed, wrapped in perfumed linen, and laid in the rocky recess. Then a great stone was used to close the entrance to the tomb. No more could be done that day, and the little company of mourners dispersed. Their faithful footsteps died away, the night winds swept past, and the Passover moon shone full upon the spot.

Jesus lay dead, but His enemies were not at ease. A guard was ordered, and for better security a cord was drawn across the stone and sealed with clay at both ends, upon which the Roman seal was placed.

The night seemed long to eyes weary with weeping and waiting for the first signs of dawn. Hardly had the eastern sky began to redden, when three women set out, laden with spices, for the garden where Jesus lay. They were Mary of Magdala, Mary the sister of Jesus' mother, and Salome, the mother of John the Evangelist.

Hurrying along in the dusk of morning, they wondered on whom they might depend to roll away the stone at the mouth of the tomb, for of

the guards and the seals they knew nothing. Nearing the tomb they found it open and empty, and the sentinels prostrate with terror, for they had seen an angel descend from heaven and roll away the stone.

Mary of Magdala stayed for a moment to be sure that the body of Jesus was no longer there, and then sped to the city to tell Peter and John what had happened. Quickly the two Apostles set out for the spot where Jesus' body lay.

Meanwhile, the other women remained, lost in perplexity, at the entrance to the tomb. Suddenly an angel appeared, who told them that Jesus had risen, and that they should see Him. Bewildered with surprise and joy, the startled women ran to tell what they had seen and heard.

Mary of Magdala followed Peter and John to the garden. John was the first to look into the empty tomb. Peter, when he arrived, entered the tomb, and noted its orderly condition.

Vague as were Peter's ideas of the resurrection of Jesus, he believed that He had indeed risen as He had promised the Apostles. John

stooped and entered the tomb, and he, too, was convinced. Both knew that the First Easter Day had dawned upon the world.

He who had conquered death, gladdened the eyes of those who loved Him five times before the close of that Easter Day. Mary of Magdala was the first to see Him. She heard a voice, and, thinking it must be that of the gardener, she asked piteously where the body of Jesus had been laid. No answer came, but soon she heard her name pronounced, "*Mary!*"

Turning hastily, Mary saw Jesus, and no words can describe her rapturous joy. Jesus then told her to hasten to tell the Apostles that she had seen Him, and she obeyed. Meanwhile, the other women, who had returned to the garden by another path, met Jesus, and their loving hearts were set at rest.

On the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a village some eight miles from the city, two of His disciples were joined by Jesus, but not until He had become a guest at their evening meal did they recognize Him.

In some friendly house in Jerusalem, all the Apostles except Thomas were gathered. Eager feet had come through the darkness, and eager voices had demanded admittance. Now the doors were fastened for fear of wrathful priests and rulers. The two who had talked with Jesus on the way to Emmaus had told their story, and in turn had learned that Jesus had appeared to Peter.

Nine of the ten Apostles present had not yet beheld Jesus since His resurrection. An interval of silence came; then, though no door had opened, no footstep sounded, Jesus stood in their midst, breaking the stillness with the words, *"Peace be unto you!"*

Grief was slow to change to joy, but as a last convincing proof of His presence, Jesus asked for food and ate it. *"Peace be unto you!"* He said again; *"Receive ye the Holy Ghost!"* He added, as His form could no longer be discerned. Silently, and as suddenly as He had appeared, Jesus had disappeared, and the First Easter Day was at an end.

"It's a sad story," said Betty. "It made me want to cry."

"Yes," said Dick, looking solemn, "it *is* sad in a way, but it isn't really sad, after all, for it ends so well."

Uncle Jim leaned back, and the children sat silently gazing into the fire.

"Have you liked these stories?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed both children.

"I'm sorry there won't be any more," said Betty.

"There are just as many more stories in the Bible," interrupted her mother, "as there are days in your life, Betty."

"Are there really, mother?" asked Betty, her eyes very wide.

But before Mrs. Burroughs could reassure her, Dick was nodding at his cousin with an air of great mystery, and Betty was nodding back at him vigorously as if to put the weight of some heavy confession on his shoulders. It finally fell to his lot to be spokesman:

"Since we've heard these stories we've changed our minds about something and that's why we have to make a—an announcement." Dick paused, but Betty nudged him to go on.

"We have decided," said the young man to his elders, in a very grown-up fashion, *"to go to Sunday School EVERY Sunday."*

"What!" exclaimed Uncle Jim.

But both children ended the dignified announcement by dancing noisily around him.

"So you see, it didn't matter about that promise of going to Sunday School *next* Sunday at all," put in Betty delightedly. "We decided last Sunday, only nobody gave us a chance to go to Sunday School, so we thought we'd keep quiet until Uncle Jim had to go, and then we'd tell you and mother for a surprise."

"Only," said Dick, with a certain note of pity in his voice, "we're going to know a lot more than the other children."

"I don't think," said Betty, "that even all the teachers know what interesting stories there are in the Bible. Now there's Solomon, who

was so wise, and the Jezebel-lady, who was so wicked, and Moses, and the Ark, and——"

"And you must both go to bed!" said Mrs. Burroughs, "for Dick and Uncle Jim must make an early start to-morrow. But," she added as she kissed them, "you are both dear, good children."

There were regretful "good nights," but at last Dick and Betty had gone to their bedrooms and were snugly tucked into their beds.

"Jim," said Mrs. Burroughs when she returned to join her brother, "you're perfectly wonderful."

"No," said Uncle Jim very solemnly, "it is the stories themselves that are wonderful. The only trouble with these two youngsters was that they had never heard the stories the right way."

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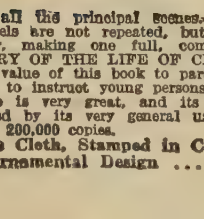

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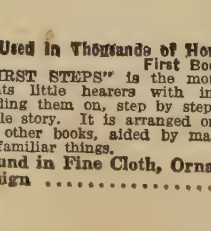

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